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The Aeschylean Concept of the Supreme Deity

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THE AESCHYLEAN CONCEPT
OF THE
SUPREME DEITY

By
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Loyola University.

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VITA

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

This tomb the dust of Aeschylus doth
hide,
Euphorion's son, and fruitful Gela's
Pride,
How tried his valour Marathon may tell
And long-haired Medes who know it all
too well.¹

Whatever Marathon's grove or the long-haired Mede may have been able to tell of the heroic battle-deeds of Aeschylus the Athenian, son of Euphorion,² those sources are uniformly silent as to another phase of that Athenian's activity. For information on the drama of Aeschylus, whether it be taken as a whole or in some one of its specific aspects, we must, and do, look elsewhere. The present effort is just such a 'looking elsewhere' for information on one facet of Aeschylean drama--the Zeus portrayed in the seven extant tragedies and fragments.

The most obvious source for the Aeschylean concept of Zeus is in the writings of that Athenian dramatist of the fifth century before Christ.³ It is there primarily that the present opusculum intends to look. To other authors, however qualified or quantified in this subject, recourse shall be had only secon-

¹Epitaph of Aeschylus, Medicean Life, 11. Trans. Plumptre.

²Life 1.

³Parian Marble Ep. 48,59.

darily and by way of evaluation in light of texts cited--this not from any desire to rule out categorically any theory (indeed, the solution herein arrived at will be in most, if not in all, points in agreement with a preexisting school of thought) but from the simple and single desire to get out of the text and for ourselves what a personal, but not personalized, investigation finds in it. The text thus threatened with belaboring is that of the Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis.⁴

The subject of the investigation is to be Zeus as portrayed in the drama of Aeschylus. There is here, therefore, no question of the theatre of Aeschylus as a whole, nor of such aspects of that theatre as the structure of his drama, the general tone, the selection and treatment of plots, the characters--except insofar as these enter into the problem to be considered. Nor, further, is there question of Greek theology in general or that of the fifth century in particular. Any attention given to the other gods by Aeschylus shall find place here only insofar as such deities bear upon his Zeus. So too must we exclude all moral questions raised by our author unless their connection with Zeus serves to further the purpose of our investigation. All these points, interesting and profitable as they may be in themselves, must find place elsewhere; they are not ad rem here.

Just what is to be made of the Zeus of Aeschylus is a question that has long vexed classical scholars. Opinion is di-

⁴Aeschyli Septem Quae Supersunt Tragoediae. Recensuit Gilbertus Murray. Oxonii, E Typographeo Clarendoniano, MDCCCXXXVII.

vided even more on this question than on the more or less similar question of the religion of Euripides, although the latter has been and is the subject of more lively debate. Schools have been formed much along the same lines as in the Euripidean question, with the prophets of the new enlightenment, Drs. Verrall⁵ and Murray, taking their characteristically rationalistic view. Professor Murray enlightens us:

. . . Aeschylus is in religious thought generally the precursor of Euripides. He stands indeed at a stage where it still seems possible to reconcile the main scheme of traditional theology with morality and reason. Euripides has reached a further point . . . Not to speak of the Prometheus, which is certainly subversive, though in detail hard to interpret, the man who speaks of the cry of the robbed birds being heard by "some Apollo, some Pan or Zeus" . . . tries more definitely to grope his way to Zeus as a Spirit of Reason . . .⁶

And so on. As something of an antithesis we find Maurice Croiset writing:

Les vieilles croyances sont tellement assises dans son imagination qu'aucune influence du dehors n'est capable de les y ébranler. Les philosophes que nous venons de nommer ont été en Grèce les initiateurs d'un temps nouveau; Eschyle, par ses doctrines fondamentales, est plutôt le dernier représentant de l'âge mythologique.⁷

⁵A.W. Verrall. The 'Agamemnon' of Aeschylus. London, Macmillan & Co., 1889, xix-xxxiv.

⁶Gilbert Murray. A History of Ancient Greek Literature. London, William Heinemann, 1897, 224.

⁷Alfred et Maurice Croiset. Histoire de la Littérature Grecque.³ III par Maurice Croiset. Paris, Anciennes Libraires Thorin et Fontemoing, 1935, 193.

Thus Croiset finds in Aeschylus the last staunch defender of the old religion. That his was a positive and not a negative defense that is to say, that he defended his Zeus and the rest of the pantheon by purifying and buttressing them at every turn instead of merely denying the assertions of the sceptics, is a point that will become clearer in later pages. Right now an adumbration of the problem or, really, problems, of Zeus in Aeschylus is in place.

First of all, what is the place of Zeus in the Aeschylean pantheon? Are the other deities, old and new, completely subject to Zeus? Are they really deities? Is Aeschylus a monotheist, a henotheist, or a polytheist? Or again, what are the attributes of Zeus? Is he just, noble, benevolent, or rather is he unjust, small, harsh? Texts can be found to "prove" either contention. What is the truth of the matter? What--and here is indeed an intricate question, one with which we shall not be able to deal adequately--what is the relation of the Zeus of Aeschylus to such forces--or are they divinities?--as Fate, Justice, Necessity? In one place we find Justice to be the daughter of Zeus, in another the force before which he must bow down. In one passage Zeus is bound to observe the decrees of Fate, in another he is Fate. And what of the relation of Zeus to man? Is he a friendly deity or is he, as in the Prometheus Bound, bent on the destruction of mankind.

It is just this play, the Prometheus Bound, which is the focal point of nearly all the dispute over the Zeus of Aeschylus.

did we not have the Prometheus Bound there would be little matter for dispute. Or again, did we have the other two plays of the Prometheus trilogy, it is very probable that much which is dubious would be made more certain. But we do not have the Prometheus Freed, save only for a few fragments, nor the Prometheus the Fire Bearer, except for one fragment, and we do have the Prometheus Bound. The problem, therefore, obtrudes itself. What is to be said of the Zeus in the Prometheus Bound who so flatly, to all appearances, contradicts the Zeus of the other six extant plays? The Zeus, for example, of the Suppliants and of the Agamemnon is a sublime conception.⁸ The Zeus of the Prometheus Bound is a harsh tyrant.⁹ The supreme deity which in his other plays Aeschylus has built up so carefully he here tears down with savage strokes. Why? The contradictory Zeus presents a real problem.

So real in fact is the problem that some scholars, and, it must be said, of very high general authority, have flatly denied that the Prometheus Bound is the work of Aeschylus.¹⁰ The temptation to adopt the attitude of H.J. Rose toward this opinion is strong. Mr. Rose footnotes his discussion of the Prometheus thus: "I do not waste paper in discussing a fantastic theory that

⁸E.g., Suppliants 524-526, 595-599, 822-824; Agamemnon 369-373, 1563-1564.

⁹E.g., Prometheus Bound 4-6, 10-11, 40-41, 53, 67-68, and so through the entire play.

¹⁰Wilhelm Schmid und Otto Stählin. Geschichte der Griechischen Literatur. Erster Teil von W. Schmid. C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1934, Zweiter Band, 261. This exhaustive work, the successor to the old Christ-Schmid, is a monument to the scholarship of its authors. What we consider to be Schmid's mistake detracts little from the value of the whole work.

the play is spurious."¹¹ However strong, though, the temptation to treat the opinion thus may be, it must be resisted. The theory of the Herren Westphal, Bethe, and Schmid is, as far as can be derived from available sources, based entirely on internal evidence.¹² The prologue, it seems, is unnecessary to the plot; the Oceanus scene is weak and in part irrelevant; the style is over-subtle, weak in metaphor. The spirit of the play, too, is not that of Aeschylus. It is the spirit of rebellion and of human pride in progress achieved in spite of heaven.

The refutation of the particular points cited by Schmid has been adequately handled by Thomson in his Introduction to and Commentary on the Prometheus Bound,¹³ and that almost entirely on the German critic's own grounds, internal evidence. But there is also external evidence for the authenticity of the play, evidence so strong, indeed, that it was not called in question for something over 2200 years. Aristotle, for example, was of the opinion that the Prometheus was really the work of Aeschylus.¹⁴

¹¹H.J. Rose. Handbook of Greek Literature. New York, E.P. Dutton & Co., 1934, 152, note 72. This attitude is rather remarkable, for the work of Mr. Rose is based largely on the extensive Geschichte of Schmid-Stählin.

¹²George Thomson. Aeschylus The Prometheus Bound. Cambridge, At the University Press, 1932. This author cites (40-41) R. Westphal, Prolegomena zu Aeschylus Tragödien (1869); E. Bethe, Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Theaters im Alterthum (1896) 159-183; W. Schmid, Untersuchungen zum gefesselten Prometheus, Stuttgart, 1929. In his Introduction Thomson handles at some length the views of Herr Schmid, whom he terms (40) "the latest and most influential" of those who deny the authenticity of the Prometheus Bound.

¹³Thomson Introduction and Commentary, passim.

¹⁴Aristotle. Poetics 1456 a 2. So well known was the play that he referred to it merely as the "Prometheus."

To which Herr Schmid has a ready response: Aristotle is not to be trusted because elsewhere he attributes to Sophocles two verses which have been rejected as spurious by modern scholars.¹⁵ Whether or not the rejection by modern scholarship is correct, Schmid's reason for rejecting the authority of Aristotle seems inadequate. There is some difference in scale between mis-attributing two lines to an author and erroneously assigning to him a whole play, especially so renowned a play to so renowned a playwright. Thus we do not say that Herr Schmid's whole work is not to be trusted because he errs in one particular; we merely say that he has made a mistake. So with Aristotle; even supposing the lines are not Sophoclean, it is a hardly logical illation to say that therefore we cannot trust Aristotle on so large an issue as the authenticity of the whole Prometheus Bound.

We have, further, the Argument of the Prometheus Bound, composed by the Alexandrians and found in the best manuscript of Aeschylus, the Medicean. It is true that the Alexandrians flourished a full two centuries after the death of Aeschylus, a situation which, but for one fact, might possibly have permitted the insertion of a spurious Prometheus Bound among the plays of Aeschylus. The fact that eliminates this possibility is culled from Plutarch.¹⁶ Toward the end of the fourth century B.C., the Athenian people determined to put an end to the "improvements" introduced into the plays of the three great tragedians by actors,

¹⁵ Aristotle Poetics, on Sophocles Antigone 910-911. Thomson, 41, note 2, undertakes to prove that the lines are genuine.
¹⁶ Plutarch X Orat. 841.

stage managers, and the like. They therefore decreed that official copies of the works of the three dramatists be made and placed in the archives and that, on presentation of a play of one of the masters, the public secretary should attend in person with the authorized text in his hands so as to be able to prevent even the slightest deviation from the original. Note, first of all, that not only did the audience know whose play was being presented, but they knew the play itself so well that they could detect and resent any interpolation. They had received these plays from their immediate forebears and they were determined to have them as they were written. Surely the fathering of a whole play such as the Prometheus Bound upon Aeschylus and in a State where the Great Dionysia was an affair of universal interest and concern would be a piece of legerdemain marvellous beyond compare. In fact, under such conditions such a fathering would be impossible. As has been remarked in another connection, no amount of internal evidence can possibly outweigh solid external evidence.¹⁷ Surely such is the case of the Prometheus Bound, a case in which the internal evidence is at least questionable and the external evidence morally certain. Thomson remarks:

Verrall used to lure us with such skill and plausibility to his fantastic conclusions that it was only after rubbing our eyes and retracing his argument that we were able to elude the spell, and we left him

¹⁷Ronald McKerrow. Prolegomena for the Oxford Shakespeare. Oxford At the Clarendon Press, 1939, 5.

wondering whether he had not been laughing at us. But Schmid's argument is so clumsily presented that it gives the reader no pleasure, and it leaves him with a sense of shame because it is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the poetry of Aeschylus.¹⁸

The Prometheus Bound, then, may safely be taken as the work of Aeschylus.

That door of escape from our problem of the contradictory Zeus having been closed to us, the door, that is, that would have some "μέτοικος from Ionia"¹⁹ write the Prometheus, there is nothing for it but to face the difficulty. Texts of the Prometheus certainly seem in contradiction to the Zeus Aeschylus so laboriously builds up elsewhere. Says Prometheus to Io and the Oceanids: "Does it not seem to you that the tyrant of the gods is violent in everything alike?"²⁰ With which compare: "May Zeus, Guardian of suppliants, look right kindly on this our band from the ship,"²¹ or, "In very truth does Zeus reverence this honored right of outcasts."²² Or consider the last lines of the passage in which Prometheus has been foretelling the fall of Zeus: "Then when he Zeus stumbles against this ill, then shall he learn how great a gulf lies between sovereignty and slavery."²³ Such a Zeus can hardly be he of whom it is said: "King of Kings, most

¹⁸Thomson, 42.

¹⁹Schmid, Untersuchungen, 109. Quoted in Thomson, 41.

²⁰Pr. B. 735-737. Translation here, as throughout unless otherwise indicated, my own.

²¹Supp. 1-2.

²²Eumenides 92.

²³Pr. B. 926-927.

blessed of the Blessed, power most absolute among the absolute, happy Zeus!"²⁴ Or again: "For the heart of Zeus is inexorable; harsh indeed are all who wield new power."²⁵ "Chorus: For harsh are the ways and hardened the heart of the son of Cronus. Prometheus: Aye, I know that Zeus is harsh."²⁶ "For Zeus, ruling thus heavily by arbitrary laws, shows to the olden gods an overbearing spirit."²⁷ Note that these latter adverse sentiments are not those of the outraged Titan but of the Chorus of Oceanids, the vehicle of Aeschylean thought.²⁸ Hear Prometheus's defiance: "Have I not seen two masters hurtled down from these heights? Aye, and yet a third, even the present lord, shall I see fall most shamefully and most swift."²⁹ Such speeches ill accord with Haigh's portrayal of the Zeus of Aeschylus:

The first point to be noticed, in regard to his religious views, is the sublime conception of Zeus as the supreme ruler of the universe . . . Zeus, then, in the conception of Aeschylus, is the ruler of all created things. But he is not a capricious monarch, swayed by casual passion . . . To act with injustice is impossible for him.³⁰

²⁴Supp. 524-526.

²⁵Pr. B. 34-35.

²⁶Ibid. 184-187.

²⁷Ibid. 402-405.

²⁸No attempt can be made here to prove this statement; such an undertaking might well constitute another Thesis. The fact that so many of the standard commentators on Aeschylus hold this view must here stand, then, as the justification for the statement.

²⁹Pr. B. 956-957.

³⁰A.E. Haigh. The Tragic Drama of the Greeks. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1896, 87-88, 90. This work is one of the most valuable of the treatises we have in English on the Greek tragic drama.

So ill, in fact, do those speeches cited above accord with this portrayal that the same author is constrained to add on a later page:

The great difficulty in the Prometheus Bound is to find any justification for the odious conduct of Zeus, and for the severity with which he punishes Prometheus on account of his services towards mankind . . . The picture of Zeus as a powerful despot, crushing all opposition to his will in spite of the nobility of his victim . . . The difficulty is to reconcile this conception of Zeus with the conception which prevails in the other plays of Aeschylus, where he is depicted as the personification of perfect justice.³¹

The contradiction, then, if indeed it be such, is, at least in broad outline, clear. What is far from clear is the solution of the difficulty. There is general agreement that our possession of the texts of the other two plays of the trilogy³² would resolve most of our doubts. And just there general agreement ceases. There is, for example, debate as to the very order of the plays within the trilogic form. Earlier scholars were accustomed to place the Prometheus the Fire-Bearer first, as por-

³¹Haigh, 111.

³²It is impossible here to go into the whole question, now indeed largely agreed upon, of whether the Prometheus constituted part of a trilogy or not. For full discussion of this point confer Thomson, Introduction, passim; Croiset, 187-188; M. Patin. Etudes sur les Tragiques Grecs.⁷ Paris, Librairie Hachette & Compagnie, 1890. I, 286, note 2, 288, note 1; Paul Mazon. Eschyle.² (Budé) Paris, Société D'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1931. I, 151 ff.; Werner Jaeger. Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture.² Trans. Gilbert Highet. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1939, 260 ff.; Haigh, 109 ff.; the trilogy theory is attacked vigorously, if not effectively, by E.G. Harman. The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus. London, Edward Arnold, 1920, 26-30.

traying the actual theft of the fire by the Titan, followed, of course, by the Prometheus Bound and the Prometheus Freed.³³ A more recent theory finds that the Prometheus Bound would be intolerably repetitious of the Prometheus the Fire-Bearer, if the latter came first. A scholion on verse 511 of the Prometheus Bound comments: ἐν γὰρ τῷ ἑξῆς δρᾶματι λύεται, ὅπερ ἐμφάνει Αἰσχύλος; and on verse 522: τῷ ἑξῆς δρᾶματι φησὶ λίσσεται τοὺς λόγους.³⁴

These statements confirm the natural impression that the Prometheus Freed followed the Prometheus Bound. The Prometheus the Fire-Bearer is, then, of necessity the final play of the trilogy. But besides the exigencies of number to establish the position of the Prometheus the Fire-Bearer we have a most admirable scholion which states: ἐν γὰρ τῷ Πυρφόρῳ γέγραπται φησὶ δέδεσθαι αὐτόν.³⁵ It but remains to explain the meaning of the title "Fire-Bearer." Briefly, Prometheus was worshipped at Athens under the very title of Πύρφορος.³⁶ This third play of the trilogy explained the origin of that title and cult much in the same way as the final play of the Oresteia explained the title and cult of the Eumenides at Athens.³⁷

Many attempts have been made to solve the riddle of the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound, attempts ranging from the flat de-

³³E.g., Welcker, as cited by Wecklein. The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus. Trans. F.D. Allen. Boston, Ginn & Co., 1897, 21, note 1.

³⁴Quoted, among other places, in Wecklein, 20.

³⁵Quoted in Thomson, 33, note 1.

³⁶Sophocles. Oedipus Coloneus 54-56, and scholion ad loc.

³⁷For fuller discussion consult references given in note 32 supra; also, Joseph Harry. Aeschylus Prometheus. New York, American Book Co., 1905, 93-94; Wecklein, 20-22.

nial of any contradiction, if the whole trilogy be considered,³⁸ through the "double Zeus" of mythology and the poet's own ideal,³⁹ through the myriad paths of the allegorists, political and otherwise,⁴⁰ to, finally, the assertion of the probability that no solution was then arrived at nor can be now.⁴¹ There are, as shall appear in a later chapter, many interpretations; to attempt to enumerate or evaluate them all would be in itself no small task. We shall limit ourselves to the four chief ones. The literature on the subject is, one might safely say, voluminous. "Certainly," in the words of Harry, "no drama has been written about so much (more than three thousand texts, annotated editions, translations, treatises, and articles)."⁴² From such a welter of thought, opinion, fancy there stands out this one main problem of the contradictory Zeus. Other issues are raised only to be subordinated to this main issue--position of Zeus in the pantheon; Aeschylean concept polytheistic, henotheistic, monotheistic; relation of Zeus to Necessity, Fate, Justice; attitude toward mankind--all intriguing, but all subordinated to the contradictory Zeus. Such shall be the method of the present effort. Other problems about the Aeschylean Zeus shall come under consideration, but secondarily and subordinately. The main effort shall be in the direction of the main problem, not an altogether unreasonable procedure.

³⁸Wecklein, 14.

³⁹Gottfried Hermann, cited in Wecklein, 14, Haigh, 88-89.

⁴⁰E.g., Louise Matthaei. Studies in Greek Tragedy. Cambridge, At The University Press, 1918, Ch. I; Harman, Ch. II.

⁴¹Haigh, 112.

⁴²Joseph Harry. Greek Tragedy. New York, Columbia University Press, 1933, I, 23.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF ZEUS

Any attempt to investigate a religious phaenomenon of ancient Greek life which does not, in some degree at least, take into consideration the religious background against which that phaenomenon appears is foredoomed to, at least, inadequacy. Greek religious concepts, whether those of one man or those of the people generally, simply do not exist in vacuo. They are the result of a long and sometimes hidden process of evolution, culminating now in this manifestation, now in that, of religious conviction or ritual. Attempts, lengthy and learned, have been made to fix upon that evolution as accurately and as exhaustively as possible,¹ with what degree of success we may leave to the specialist to determine.

The present course lies clear. If we are to do justice to our treatment of the Zeus of Aeschylus, we must, in however summary a fashion, see something of the concept of Zeus that preceded and was contemporary with the Aeschylean concept. The better to clarify our consideration we may focus it on three men, whose writings, two as predecessors, one as a contemporary of

¹See, for example, Martin Nilsson. A History of Greek Religion. Trans. F. Fielden. Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1925; Jane Harrison. Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion. Cambridge, At the University Press, 1903.

Aeschylus, we shall utilize in filling in the background of our subject. What Zeus was to Homer, to Hesiod, and to Pindar is, of course, a question which taken as a whole or in each of its several parts, presents opportunity for no end of amplification. Obviously, that question cannot be entered into here.

Zeus, like all the other gods in Homer, is largely anthropomorphic. He is said to be the "father of gods and men." With such a father it is little wonder that the Homeric gods are what they are, "not superior beings who reward virtue in others or practice it themselves. They are only occasionally sublime and rarely deserve reverence or affection."² Zeus is the supreme lord of Olympus. He takes counsel with his peers, but is not bound to follow their advice;³ the final decision is entirely his own, and the other gods, whether they like it or not--and frequently they do not--must acquiesce. "For surely," avers Hermes, "it is by no means possible for another god to transgress or make vain the purpose of Zeus, lord of the aegis."⁴ Or again, when Zeus had become weary of Poseidon's interference in the strife of Achaeans and Trojans, he commanded him "to leave off fighting and war, and betake himself to the race of the gods, or into the shining sea,"⁵ and Poseidon, for all his claims of equality in honor with Zeus, "departed from the host of the Achaeans and

²John Scott. The Unity of Homer. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1921, 177.

³Cf. Iliad i.

⁴Odyssey v, 103 ff.

⁵Il. xv, 160 ff.

passed to the sea and sank."⁶

That the sway of Zeus in Homer was that of might rather than of right is abundantly clear to the reader of the poems. His dwelling on Olympus amounts practically to a royal court, with the other gods coming to ask a favor or complain of a wrong. Thus at a banquet of the gods Athena obtained permission for Odysseus to return home,⁷ and Hera vainly taunted Zeus for planning reverses for the Greeks.⁸ So long as the other gods did not anger him, Zeus was content to allow them pretty much to work their will. Once roused, though, as, for example, at the nagging of Hera,⁹ he could and did become terrible in his wrath. Gods and men alike stood in dread of the thunderbolt. They might disagree with him, dispute with him, deceive him, but there was a time to stop, and he who did not do so learned to his sorrow that he had gone too far.

Zeus had all the foibles of mankind, of which inconsistency is not the least. Early in the fourth book of the Iliad¹⁰ he seemed eager to bring the war to an immediate conclusion, so that Troy might remain standing, Helen return home, and a general reconciliation follow--all this after we are given the motive of the entire action in the opening lines of the poem: Διὸς δ' ἐτέλεετο Βούλη.¹¹ In the first book of the Iliad Zeus is pictured as playing the bully in his own home in the account of his hurling

⁶Il. xv, 218 f.

⁷Od. v, 1-42.

⁸Il. i, 559.

⁹Il. i, 545 ff.

¹⁰Ibid. iv, 14 ff. ¹¹Ibid. i, 5.

his son Hephaestus from the threshold of Olympus because he had tried to shield his mother from one of his father's savage attacks.¹² Yet Zeus joins in the irrepressible laughter to see that son hobbling about the court, assisting at the feast of the gods.¹³ In Book II of the Iliad he deceives Agamemnon with a lying dream.¹⁴ In the fourteenth book of the same poem his carnal desires turn him from the accomplishment of his purpose.¹⁵ Zeus was hardly a deity on whom men might model their conduct, nor was he one who might demand rectitude of others. In the words of Scott:

The halls of Olympus would have resounded with peals of "Homeric laughter" had Zeus laid down a code of laws which contained such a sentence as: "Honor thy father and thy mother," for all knew too well what he had done to his own father Cronos; or such a sentence as "Thou shalt not commit adultery," when they all knew the scandals of his many amours. Most of the divinities would be conscientious nullificationists if there had been any interdict on lying, covetousness, and stealing.¹⁶

The relation of Zeus to Fate or Destiny is a matter that is not clear in Homer. At times the lord of Olympus seems to yield to the inexorable decrees of Fate, as when in the sixteenth book of the Iliad he says, "Alack, that it is fated that Sarpedon, dearest of mortals to me, should fall before Patroclus, son of Menoetius." Indeed, he is of two minds, whether to snatch

¹²Iliad. i, 590 ff.

¹³Ibid. i, 599-600.

¹⁴Ibid. ii, 5-6.

¹⁵Ibid. xiv, 346 ff.

¹⁶Scott, 177-178.

his son away to his home in Lycia or to let him die, till Hera reminds him that it is Sarpedon's lot to die at this time.¹⁷

"Neither men nor gods can ward it off, when the baneful lot of death overtakes a man."¹⁸ Zeus bows therefore to inevitable Fate, but "he shed bloody raindrops on the earth in honor of his son, whom Patroclus was about to slay in deep-soiled Troy, far from his native land."¹⁹ But the conception of Fate is so far from clear in Homer that in other places he does not separate it from the dispensation of Zeus himself. If we ask whether Fate is or is not higher than Zeus, we are met with the answer:

That is a question which the Homeric bard could never have answered--but neither would he have asked it, for he had not yet been troubled with modern controversies about Free Will and Determinism. The Homeric poets hardly considered Fate as really distinct from the will of Zeus--neither did they consider them explicitly identical . . . Homeric religion is based not so much on logic as upon imagination, a fact which it is easy for literary criticism to overlook.²⁰

Such, briefly, is the Zeus of Homer--a supreme deity, now subject to, again identified with Fate, who reigns by force on Olympus; as a rule capricious, now benign and patient, now harsh and wrathful, he is, except in broad outline, unpredictable. In the words Lucian puts into the mouth of Heraclitus: "What are men?

¹⁷Il. xvi, 431 ff.

¹⁸Od. iii, 236.

¹⁹Il. xvi, 459 ff.

²⁰Henry Browne, S.J. Handbook of Homeric Study. London, Longmans, Green, & Co., 1905, 199.

Mortal gods. What are gods? Immortal men."²¹ That is just what the Homeric Zeus is, an immortal man with much of rugged human grandeur mixed in with a liberal scattering of human foibles.

In Hesiod we note an advance in the concept of Zeus. In the Works and Days Zeus, the king of the immortals, is also the supreme governor of men. His eye is all-seeing, his mind all-knowing--*πάντα ἰδὼν ἁλὸς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ πάντα νοήσας*,²² but "there is no prophet among men upon the earth who shall know the mind of aegis-bearing Zeus."²³ The poet insists, and here is a very considerable advance over Homer, that the chief attribute of Zeus is Justice. From Zeus straight judgments proceed,²⁴ particularly in the punishment of insolence or sin; indeed it is on this aspect of justice that Hesiod lays the greatest stress.²⁵ The maiden Justice is:

. . . daughter of Zeus, glorified and enthroned by the gods who dwell in Olympus. And whensoever one doeth her an injury with wrongful chiding, straightway she takes her seat by the side of father Zeus, the son of Cronus, and tells him the thoughts of unjust men, that the people may pay for the infatuation of princes, who with baneful thoughts turn aside from the straight path through wrongful judgments.²⁶

Zeus himself and all the gods in general seem to be more remote

²¹ Lucian. Vitarum Auctio, 14. Quoted in James Adam. The Religious Teachers of Greece. Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1923, 27.

²² Hesiod. Works and Days, 267.

²³ Hesiod. Frag. 177. Trans. Goettling.

²⁴ Works and Days, 36.

²⁵ Ibid., 238 ff., 242 ff., 284 ff., 320 ff., 327 ff.

²⁶ Ibid., 256 ff. Trans. Adam.

than in Homer, with daemons acting as intermediaries between them and mankind.

In the other major poem of Hesiod, the Theogony, we have, as the name indicates, an account of the successive generations of the gods. There were three dynasties of supreme rulers of the gods, succeeding one another in order of time--the dynasties of Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus.²⁷ This work, obviously of an earlier stage of religious thought, is full of those grossly naturalistic legends to which Greek philosophy took just exception. "Throughout the whole poem," writes Adam, "the conception of the gods as moral beings scarcely appears at all; the assessors²⁸ even of Zeus himself are Violence and Force rather than Justice."

Thus the Theogony, representing a Zeus newly in power, gives a picture of a harsh and arbitrary tyrant, inferior on all counts to the Homeric Zeus. But the Zeus of the Works and Days is a distinct advance in the direction of a more just and divine personality, as opposed to a capricious and anthropomorphic one, than can be found in either the Iliad or the Odyssey.

There remains but a brief consideration of the Zeus of a great contemporary of Aeschylus, the poet Pindar. In the main he adheres to the anthropomorphic conception of the gods, which is everywhere characteristic of the national Greek religion. Pindar, although, of course, much more the poet of Apollo than he is of Zeus, sees in the latter the supreme deity of the pantheon.

²⁷Hesiod. Theogony, 154 ff., 459 ff., 617 ff.

²⁸Adam, 70.

More, he refuses to see in him or in any other Olympian anything that offends his moral sensibilities.²⁹ That there are many gods we gather immediately from his first Olympian Ode. That Zeus, as has been said, dominates officially the world of the gods³⁰ is the result of a well-organized state, won by his victory over the Titan brood. "In the first Olympian, as in all the Olympians," writes Gildersleeve, "Zeus rules serenely. It is true that his throne, Aitna, rests on the violent hundred-headed Typhorus, but we do not feel the stirrings of the revolted spirit as in the Pythians."³¹ Zeus, together with the other gods his subordinates "knows neither sickness nor age nor labor: he has escaped the loud-roaring gulf of Acheron."³² The second Pythian presents, perhaps, the most famous of the poet's sentiments in regard to the godhead:

God accomplishes every end according
to his expectation; God who overtakes
even the winged eagle and outstrippeth
the dolphin of the sea, and bringeth
many a proud man low, vouchsafing to
others the renown that grows not old.³³

Pindar often insists on the inevitability of Fate, so far as human creatures are concerned,³⁴ but seldom, according to Adam,³⁵ does he imply that Fate can override the will of Zeus. In fact we find passages in which the will of Zeus is itself con-

²⁹Ibid. 116-117.

³⁰Pindar. Olympian Odes, i, 10.

³¹Basil L. Gildersleeve. Pindar, the Olympian and Pythian Odes. New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899, xxix.

³²Pindar. Frags. 143.

³³Pindar. Pythian Odes, ii, 49 ff. Trans. Adam.

³⁴Ibid. xii, 30; Nemean Odes, xi, 42; iv, 41 ff.

³⁵Adam, 119.

ceived as Fate; thus, "the fated decree of Zeus,"³⁶ and the "fate ordained of God,"³⁷ may serve as examples.

Zeus is omniscient: "if a man thinks he can escape the eye of God when he does a thing, he is in error."³⁸ Zeus is just,³⁹ and the just are the objects of his care: "for of a certainty the great mind of Zeus steers the destiny of those whom he loves."⁴⁰ Zeus is true, for "Truth is the daughter of Zeus."⁴¹ Pindar definitely rejects theomachies as below the dignity of the gods. There is, he holds, one divine purpose shaping the course of events, the purpose of Zeus: "With thee, O Father Zeus, is the accomplishment of all deeds."⁴²

Clearly, then, the Zeus of this great contemporary of Aeschylus is a most decided advance over that of the men who preceded him. His Zeus seems reasonable to us, a thing which could not be said of that deity in either Homer or Hesiod. His Zeus seems to have passed from the stage of story and poem to that of religion, to a position where the reverence and esteem of good men is not a forced thing but the spontaneous effusion of a commanded respect. What Zeus was to Aeschylus, called the theologian of Greece, remains to be seen in succeeding pages.

³⁶Nemean, iv, 61.

³⁷Olympian, ii, 21.

³⁸Ibid., i, 64.

³⁹Nemean, x, 54.

⁴⁰Pythian, v, 122 f.

⁴¹Olympian, x, 3 f.

⁴²Nemean, x, 29 f.

CHAPTER III

THE ORTHODOX ZEUS OF THE PLAYS

One who would arrive at anything resembling a conclusion in this problem of the Zeus of Aeschylus must, if he would rule, divide. That, then, is the course we adopt. We divide the work of our author into two parts, quantitatively, it is true, unequal, but sufficiently opposed effectively to counterbalance each other. The present chapter concerns itself with the Aeschylean Zeus as found in six of the seven extant plays, in, that is, the Suppliants, the Persians, the Seven Against Thebes, the Agamemnon, the Libation-Bearers, and the Eumenides. Our next chapter will deal with the remaining extant play, the Prometheus Bound, which, as we have said, is the source of our difficulty.

What then is to be said of the 'orthodox' Zeus in the six enumerated plays? Just what sort of a god is he? Is he supreme--absolute lord and master, and if he is, is he the only god, or is Aeschylus a henotheist or a polytheist? And what of the "double Zeus," one of mythology and one of the "reformed Aeschylean theology," which some authors hold? Again, is Zeus just, and if so, what is his relation to Justice, to Right, to Fate? Is he benevolent and noble in his relations with mankind? Each of these questions we shall consider in order and answer each, as far as possible, in the words of Aeschylus himself.

Zeus is unquestionably the supreme deity. When, in the

Suppliants, the maidens who are the subject of that play are left alone while their father goes for aid, sing an ode of fear of the pursuing sons of Aegyptus, it is to Zeus as omnipotent that they address their pleas: "Have regard of thy suppliants, O Zeus, all-powerful upholder of the land."¹ When, somewhat earlier in the play, they are relating in an ode their origin and how they are descendants of Zeus and Argive Io, they sing: "Zeus [it was] through unending time the lord . . ."² Later in this same ode--indeed if, as is true, the Suppliants presents the most exalted picture of Zeus, this ode (524-599) is the creme de la creme--we find:

. . . he wise of eld, he who devises
all things, who prospers all things,
yea, Zeus. He is not seated on his
throne by hest of another, nor holds
his sway subject to a stronger. Nor
does he in low station stand in awe
before another seated above him. As
he utters the word, so he accomplishes
the work, and whatsoever his mind in
its wisdom conceives, that he does
right speedily.³

Such a picture of Zeus should convince the reader of the Suppliants that that deity is, indeed, supreme in the mind of Aeschylus. But as if that were not enough, the poet presents us with two more passages which confirm us in our conviction. When the herald of the sons of Aegyptus had been worsted and the Danaids are about to be escorted into the city by a chorus of maidens

¹Supp. 815-816.

²Ibid. 574-575.

³Ibid. 592-599.

that body sings: "The mighty, untrammelled will of Zeus is not to be crossed."⁴ Nor has it been, nor will it be, as in the sequel the daughters of Danaus learn to their sorrow. The final passage from the Suppliants on the supremacy of Zeus is, perhaps, the most sublime invocation of a god that we find in the whole of Greek poetry. Aeschylus holds up in plain view his exalted estimate of him whom Homer had call "the father of gods and men." The Chorus of Danaids, left alone by their father's departure with Pelasgus to the Argive assembly, begin their ode of petition: "King of Kings, most blessed of the Blessed, power most sure of accomplishment among the sure, happy Zeus, hear."⁵ Surely such a plea, were there a Zeus, could not remain unanswered, for if words mean anything, those which Aeschylus here puts into the mouth of his Chorus--remember that the Aeschylean chorus is supposed to speak the mind of the poet--are the highest and most sublime that could be offered by any one professing a merely natural religion, so high and sublime that were they inserted into some books of the Old Testament, the Psalms, say, or the Book of Job, they would be so much of a piece with them as not to be distinguishable from the other lofty sentiments there expressed.

Of all the plays of Aeschylus the Persians presents us with the fewest references to Zeus, whether descriptive invocations or simple vocatives. The reason is clear enough--the entire scene is laid in a far land peopled by barbarians, folk who

⁴Supp. 1048-1049.

⁵Ibid. 524-527.

could not be expected to be as keenly aware of the preeminence of Zeus as the Greeks were. It is significant that the sole instance we have to cite from the Persians indicative of Aeschylus's conviction of the sovereignty of Zeus are lines spoken by the Chorus of Persian Elders. The poet, by that same naïveté with which he has the Persians consistently refer to themselves as "the barbarians," has his Chorus address the supreme deity to this effect: "O Zeus, King, now that you have destroyed the hosts of the boastful and countless Persians . . ." ⁶ The epithet 'King' used by Persians has, of course, the special significance of uniqueness. Darius had been King of men. Zeus is King of all, gods and men. Their recognition of the supremacy of Zeus, then, though not reiterated like that of the daughters of Danaus, is none the less real and effective.

The Seven Against Thebes furnishes us with a pair of citations which indicate the sovereignty of Zeus. The Chorus of Theban Maidens, terrified at the advance of the foe and the stir and tumult of impending battle, in near-hysteria are taking the heart out of the soldiery. Eteocles seeks to quiet them, but they, not to be silenced, invoke the gods, and in a most significant manner. Three times they call upon heaven, each time upon deities they feel more powerful to help their cause. First, "O guardian company of the gods," ⁷ note, therefore, just the gods in general. Then, fearing that the previous invocation had not been

⁶Persians 532-534.

⁷Seven Against Thebes 251.

specific enough or addressed to the most interested gods: "Gods of our city!"⁸ And finally, as the climax of petition, the address to him whom above all the gods they knew to be supreme: "O all-powerful Zeus, flash thy bolt against the foe."⁹ Such an obviously climactic order speaks for itself. Nor is it only the terrified piety of females that believes Zeus sovereign. The hero of the play, Eteocles, in appointing the fourth champion to do battle with the Argive assailant finds that Hyperbius, his man, shall conquer, for he has as blazon on his shield "Father Zeus, with a fiery bolt in his grasp; and never yet, I ween, has any man seen Zeus worsted."¹⁰ His argument is valueless, of course, to prove the invincibility of his champion; it is far from valueless to prove the estimate he and, behind him, Aeschylus had of the power of Zeus.

The Oresteian trilogy furnishes us with a good number of lines indicative of the poet's estimate of the Olympian. In the parados of the Agamemnon the Chorus of Argive Elders sings: "Thus Zeus, lord of the stranger, mightier far than the sons of Atreus . . ."¹¹ Or again, "Hail sovereign Zeus . . . the 'blow of Zeus' they name it . . . as he decrees, so does he act."¹² In the closing scene of the play, when the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra has been disclosed, Clytemnestra stands quarreling with the Chorus; they break forth: "Alack, alas, by the will of Zeus,

⁸Seven 253.

⁹Ibid. 255.

¹⁰Ibid. 512-514.

¹¹Agamemnon 60-62.

¹²Ibid. 355, 367, 369.

cause of all, worker of all! For what is accomplished for mortals without the will of Zeus?"¹³ In the opening lines of the Eumenides we find another significant juxtaposition of deities. The prophetess who speaks the prologue is invoking the gods; she speaks first of the ancient dynasty, Earth, Themis, then coming to the reigning gods she lists in order Phoebus Apollo, Pallas, Dionysus, Poseidon, and finally, as a climax, "and Zeus the Filler, Most High."¹⁴

As if in his last work, the Eumenides, he desired to dispel any lingering doubt as to the supremacy of his Zeus, Aeschylus in a series of speeches has the other gods themselves place the Thunderer at their head. Apollo, pleading the cause of Orestes before the court of the Areopagus, says: "Not ever on my seer's throne have I spoken--no neither of man, nor of woman, nor of state--that which was not commanded me by Zeus, father of the Olympians. Learn how strong is this just plea, and I bid you yield consent to the father's design. For an oath is in no wise stronger than Zeus."¹⁵ He plainly admits his dependence on Zeus in that declaration as well as in the one which follows immediately:

Fetters Zeus might loose, of them there
is a cure, and a great many ways of
loosing them. But when the dust hath
drawn off the blood of a man, once dead,
there is no resurrection. For this my
father has devised no charms, but all

¹³Ag. 1485-1488.

¹⁴Eumenides 28.

¹⁵Ibid. 616-621.

other things he disposes thus and so,
nor does it so much as disturb his
breath.¹⁶

Athena, too, acknowledges her dependence. In persuading the Furies to become good spirits she has to overcome their reluctance to submit to a superior power. In the course of her argument she says: "I, too, rely on Zeus."¹⁷ In the same connection she remarks: "But to me, too, Zeus has given no mean intelligence."¹⁸ And finally, in accepting the cult at Athens, the Furies-become-Eumenides profess themselves gratified to be connected with Athena and Athens, "which she, with Zeus the omnipotent, and Ares, hold, a citadel of the gods."¹⁹

But is Zeus the only deity? Is Aeschylus a monotheist? If not such, he is either a henotheist²⁰ or a polytheist. Which? Although it is true that much of what Aeschylus wrote of Zeus was monotheistic in tone, it can hardly be maintained that his conception of the divinity was really such. The plays are too full of references to the other gods, references obviously portraying an evident belief, to allow us seriously to entertain the notion that the poet was a believer in one god. Adam remarks in this connection:

. . . the poet clearly assumes the essential unity of the divine purpose as manifest in the world. It

¹⁶Eum. 645-651.

¹⁷Ibid. 826.

¹⁸Ibid. 850.

¹⁹Ibid. 918-919.

²⁰Henotheism may be defined as that system of religion which, while admitting the existence of more than one god, gives worship to only one.

would nevertheless be an error to suppose that Aeschylus is in any proper sense of the term a monotheist. He constantly recognizes a plurality of Gods; and nowhere does he contend against the prevailing polytheism . . . The most we can fairly say on the subject of Aeschylean monotheism is that in Aeschylus the personality of Zeus overshadows that of all the inferior Gods to a much greater extent than formerly; and that in the dynasty of Gods to which Zeus belongs, there is but a single purpose, but a single ruling will, the will of Zeus himself. ²¹

We have gods appearing as characters in two of our extant dramas --Apollo, Athena, and the Eumenides in the play of that name, Force, Violence, Hephaestus, Prometheus, Oceanus, and Hermes in the Prometheus Bound. Besides these personal appearances, hardly to be expected in the play of a man who was a monotheist, we have numerous references to other gods. Earth, Heaven, Themis, Cronus, the Titans, Hades, Poseidon, Ares, Aphrodite, Hera--these and a host of other gods, great and small, constitute the Aeschylean pantheon.

There is one text, and that a fragment, which would make Aeschylus, of all things, a pantheist: "Zeus is air, Zeus is earth, Zeus is heaven, Zeus is, in truth, all things and whatever is beyond them."²² This passage is unparalleled in all that we have of our author and cannot be taken as embodying his fixed belief in the face of all the evidence we have to the contrary.

²¹Adam, 143-144.

²²Fragment 70. Nauck.² Quoted in Aeschylus. 2 vols. (Loeb) Ed. Herbert W. Smyth. London, William Heinemann, London, 1922. II, 403.

It is probably ascribable to the influence of Heraclitus, which was being felt in Aeschylus's time, or to some pantheistic doctrine of the Orphic type.

Another interesting, because perplexing, set of lines occurs in the Agamemnon: "Zeus, whoso'er he be--if by this name he loves to be invoked, by this name then shall I call him. Weighing all, no power I know save only 'Zeus.'"²³ On this passage Haigh remarks:

Even the name of Zeus was to him a mere convention. Like Pindar, he felt himself at liberty to reject what was hateful and improbable. But the ancient mythical gods were more to him than mere types and abstractions; and though their names might be uncertain, and their deeds distorted by tradition, he seems to have felt no doubt in his heart that they were real and potent divinities.²⁴

It will have been observed that even in this somewhat startling confession of his doubt as to just who Zeus is Aeschylus still adheres to the idea that, whoever he is, he is the all-powerful one.

It seems clear, then, that the Zeus of Aeschylus was not a monotheistic conception. Nor can it honestly be said to be henotheistic, for although, as has been said again and again, Zeus is the supreme deity, he is not, even pro tempore or territorially, the sole deity worshipped. The conclusion that Aeschy-

²³Ag. 159-165. I have not seen Gilbert Murray's comment on this passage. He surely must have one somewhere, one, I doubt not, highly interesting.

²⁴Haigh, 89.

us was a polytheist seems entirely justifiable, a conclusion that, if nothing else, serves to point the lesson that even great men cannot rise too far above their coevals. Men whose stature o'ertops their fellows reach that status by standing on the shoulders of men only less great. Aeschylus had, in Greece, no monotheistic shoulders on which to stand.

And yet such a noble conception of Zeus as we have seen Aeschylus to possess ill accords, it must be confessed, with the great body of Greek mythology or even, and this is the cause of no small trouble to the critic, with the actions he sometimes performs in Aeschylus himself. We do not refer here to the difficulties which arise from the Prometheus Bound--they shall have their proper place in the next chapter--but to the inconsistencies which appear in the plays we have called, by way of indicating some division, 'orthodox.' Such divergency in the very citadel of Aeschylean religious thought has led some critics²⁵ to posit a double Zeus in Aeschylus, the one, the ordinary god of the myths with his foibles, and the other, the true Zeus of reformed Aeschylean theology who appears in many of the texts already cited in treating of his sovereignty. These critics suggest that Aeschylus was not a genuine believer in the popular myths but that he adopted their outward form by way of making more palatable to the common people his new philosophical deity.

Such a theory, like, as we shall see, those of the alle-

²⁵Most notably by G. Hermann, Op. 8, 144 ff. Quoted in Haigh, 88.

gorists of the Prometheus Bound, is not altogether devoid of a certain plausibility. Unlike those other theories it is possessed of a certain air of learned discernment which would invite the dilettante to accept and propagate it. But, for all that, the theory has against it serious objections which, remaining substantially unanswered, have brought it into something akin to disrepute. First of all, the probability of any such clear distinction in the mind of Aeschylus between popular myth and a higher Zeus is rather low. He is too careless in mingling the two concepts, if he really holds them as distinct. Thus immediately following the passage already cited as the most sublime invocation of a god in the whole of Greek poetry, "King of Kings," etc., the Danaids bid Zeus recall the gladsome tale of their ancestress Io, the woman of his love.²⁶ Or again, when in the Agamemnon he is addressed as the master of the universe, it is only to have recalled in the ensuing lines that he had gained the mastery by wiles in the overthrow of his own father.²⁷ Such inconsistencies, inevitable in the writing of a man trying to purify myth without substantially altering it, would never be found so closely joined if the author were trying to change radically the religion of the Greeks.

A further consideration combines with the preceding to rule out effectively the double Zeus theory. Aeschylus is particularly careful whenever the original myth has his gods engage

²⁶Supp. 531-533.

²⁷Ag. 171-175.

in activities of which he cannot entirely approve to gloss over their shortcomings and explain them away as much as possible. Thus the whole Io incident, both in the Suppliants and in the Prometheus Bound, is put upon as high a plane as possible by the stressing of the fact that as a result of that forced union Heracles will, in the course of time, be born. Or again, Zeus's treatment of his father Cronus is placed, as far as possible, upon grounds of justice and progress instead of the bald trickery and usurpation that is to be found in Hesiod. Other instances might be cited; these must suffice. The point is, that such anxiety to smooth over the seams in the patchwork of the national religion would hardly be proper to one bent on ousting that religion for a better, because more philosophical, one of his own. Aeschylus was a deeply religious man, but he was not a philosopher. Any theory that would make him out such can hardly stand the test of a searching impartial criticism.

An attribute of the Aeschylean Zeus which comes in for some consideration here is that of his justice. Is Zeus just, and if, and when, we can show that Aeschylus conceived of him as preeminently just, what is his relation to Justice and Fate? That Zeus is just we can assert from all that we have seen of him so far. Further, we have considerable offerings on the point by Aeschylus himself. And first of all, in the first stasimon of the Suppliants the Chorus of Danaids says that if he does not protect them from the pursuing sons of Aegyptus, "Zeus shall lay himself open to the charge of injustice . . ."²⁸ a contingency,

²⁸ Supp. 168-169.

clearly, to be placed on the extreme verge of possibility. Later in the same play the maidens, in conversing with Pelasgus, king of Argos, show still further confidence in the justice of Zeus: "Both parties does Zeus, kin to bothⁱⁿ blood, look down upon with impartial measure, dealing, as is meet, ill to the evil, good to the righteous."²⁹ Surely there can be no question but that the Olympian^{is} just, yet the daughters of Danaus must once more call our attention to the fact. After presenting their case to Pelasgus and urging him to do all in his power to protect them suppliants in his land, they sum up their whole argument in a single pregnant sentence: "Take thought on these. They are just ordinances from Zeus."³⁰

Once more we have from the Persians but a single text to quote, for, as was explained above,³¹ the references in that play are very few. In the present case Darius, summoned from the tomb by the wails of Atossa and the Chorus of Persian Elders, has learned of the fearful loss of Persian arms and, in turn, predicts further disaster. Then he assigns a cause for the Persian downfall--overweening pride: "Zeus," he says, "in very truth is the punisher of arrogance and heavy is his chastening hand."³² A single instance, too, from the Seven Against Thebes must suffice. The Chorus of Theban Maidens, somewhat quieted at length by Eteocles from their former terror, utters a prayer as one of the

²⁹Supp. 402-404.

³⁰Ibid. 436.

³¹Cf. p. 25 f.

³²Bers. 827-828.

champions named to oppose the Argive warriors goes forth: "As with raving mind they [the Argive enemy] proudly boast against the city, so may Zeus, the Awarder, look down on them with wrath."³³ That they look to "Zeus, the Awarder" to deal just judgment to the arrogance of the vaunting foe, goes without saying.

The Oresteia again presents us with several instances illustrating our point. The Argive Elders give utterance to a typically Aeschylean sentiment: "Someone has said that the gods think it beneath them to look to mortals who spurn the grace of sacred things. That man was impious."³⁴ Another text tells us that so long as Zeus abides on his throne, so long shall it abide that to the doer it shall be done³⁵--another instance of the even-handed justice of the Thunderer. Though justice may be slow in coming from the hand of Zeus, it is all the more sure. He does not fail: "Zeus, Zeus, who sendest up from below upon the daring and evil deeds of men their retribution long-deferred . . ."³⁶ Electra invokes Zeus, requiring justice against the murderers of her father: "And when will flourishing Zeus lay his hand upon them, ah me! . . . Let the land receive pledges of it. I demand justice after all this injustice."³⁷ And such justice is she to have, justice by the grace of Zeus, the just one.

What is to be said of the relation between the just Zeus

³³Seven 483-485.

³⁴Ag. 1563-1564.

³⁵Ibid. 369-372.

³⁶Libation-Bearers 382-385.

³⁷Lib.-B. 394-398.

and Dike, Justice? Is Justice superior to him? Is he Justice? or is it inferior to him? We may cite a few passages from the orthodox plays. In the Suppliants we read: "Yea verily, may Justice, daughter of Zeus the apportioner, Justice, protectress of the suppliant . . ." ³⁸ Justice, then, here at least, far from being superior to Zeus, is called his daughter. We have exactly the same predication in a couplet of the Seven Against Thebes. Eteocles, learning that Polyneices himself has chosen to assail the seventh gate and determining to go in person to engage his brother, laments the fact of the latter's waywardness: "But if Justice, the virgin daughter of Zeus, were the companion of his thoughts and deeds . . ." ³⁹ Passing over three other references to Justice in which her connection with Zeus is not too clear, ⁴⁰ we come to a passage in the Libation-Bearers in which Justice and Zeus, together with Might, are conceived as working together to lend to the children of Agamemnon their aid in avenging his murder: "May Might, and Justice, and Zeus the third, greatest of all, come to our aid." ⁴¹ Another passage from the same play brings together the Fates, Zeus, and Justice in the accomplishment of a desired end: "But, O ye great Fates, thus grant fulfillment through the power of Zeus even as Justice now turneth." ⁴² Somewhat later we find the Chorus singing:

But the bitterly sharp blade is near

³⁸Supp. 359-360. I have here and in one or two other places taken Themis, Right, as practically synonymous with Justice.
³⁹Seven 662-663.
⁴⁰Ag. 250-251, 381-384, 773-775.
⁴¹Lib.B. 244-245.
⁴²Ibid. 306-308.

the breast and at the hest of Justice presses home. For of a truth the injustice of him who has unjustly trespassed upon the due reverence of Zeus lies trampled on the ground. The anvil of of Justice is firmly fixed.⁴³

Finally we return once more to the conception of Justice as the daughter of Zeus: ". . . who is indeed the daughter of Zeus, Justice we mortal men name her."⁴⁴

Justice, then, it is clear, is not superior to Zeus. The thought of Aeschylus seems to be just about evenly divided between calling them, if not actually equals, nearly so, and positing the former as his daughter. A somewhat similar situation obtains in regard to Fate. One citation connecting Fate and Zeus as on a cooperative footing has already been given.⁴⁵ We find in the Suppliants a set of lines which seem to identify Fate with the will of Zeus: "Whatever is fated, that will come to pass. The mighty, untrammelled will of Zeus is not to be crossed."⁴⁶ The Chorus of Elders in the Persians sings: "For by the will of the gods Fate has ruled from of old."⁴⁷ The Furies, arraigning Orestes before the Areopagus, furnish us with a final test on this subject. They are speaking of their task of avenging blood-guilt: "Who then of mortals does not reverence this and fear it, hearing me tell of the ordinance made unto me by Fate by the will of the gods for its fulfillment?"⁴⁸ We find, then, in the six orthodox

⁴³Lib.-B. 639-645.

⁴⁴Ibid. 949-950.

⁴⁵Of. p. 37 supra.

⁴⁶Supp. 1047-1049.

⁴⁷Pers. 93-95.

⁴⁸Eum. 389-393.

plays a perfect harmony, whether of identity or congruity is a point beyond the scope of the present inquiry, between Zeus and Justice and Fate. The three present an admirable example of what happens when the eye is single--the whole body is lightsome.

A final, and very brief, consideration will be that of the attitude of the orthodox Zeus of Aeschylus toward mankind. To attempt to set down and comment upon all the passages that have been gathered under the headings of "Zeus benevolent" and "Zeus guardian" in the careful perusal of the extant plays which preceded the task of writing, would be to stretch out this chapter to an intolerable length. We shall content ourselves with a very few citations. The reader may turn up the other passages for himself.⁴⁹

The Danaids beseech: "O Zeus, have pity on our woes, lest we perish utterly."⁵⁰ The simple faith of these young maidens portrays a Zeus concerned with the fate of his creatures, a benign Zeus. King Pelasgus, brooding over his entry into the Danaus-Aegyptus quarrel, muses: "And when goods have been plundered from a home, yet others may come, thanks to Zeus, guardian of household wealth."⁵¹ Seated, then, as he is on Olympus's heights, Zeus is interested in the affairs of men. Later in the play the Danaids call down blessing on their benefactors: "Thus may their

⁴⁹Supp. 1-2, 26-27, 190-193, 206, 347, 473-479, 627, 641; Seven 89, 116-117, 1080-1081; Ag. 43-44, 677-678, 748, 1036-1037; Lib.-B. 18-19; 775; Eum. 92, 213-214, 365, 973, 1045-1046; Fragments 55, 86, 162.

⁵⁰Supp. 210.

⁵¹Ibid. 445.

city be governed well, if only they have regard for great Zeus, Zeus, above all, Lord of Strangers, who, by his sage direction, guides destiny aright,"⁵² and, "May Zeus bring the land to bear its destined fruit by seasonable growth."⁵³ In the Seven Against Thebes Eteocles heartens his warriors: "Zeus will prove a Savior."⁵⁴ He cares, then, for the folk of Thebe-town individually; also collectively, for: "O mighty Zeus . . . who in very truth defends these walls of Cadmus!"⁵⁵ Men, too, appreciate the care Zeus exercises over them, for the herald in the Agamemnon, having related the successful sseige of Troy, concludes: "And the grace of Zeus shall have full course of honor for that it brought us to our accomplished end."⁵⁶ The Chorus, too, recognizes the munificence of Zeus: "Indeed a great and plenteous gift from Zeus, aye, from the furrows that every year produce, destroys the blight of famine."⁵⁷ Such citations must suffice to indicate in broad outline the attitude of the orthodox Zeus towards mankind, an attitude at once benign and powerful, helpful and considerate.

Our litany, then, is complete. Zeus is the supreme deity of a polytheistic religion, purged in the mind of Aeschylus, just, benevolent, noble. And then comes the Prometheus Bound.

⁵²Supp. 670-678.

⁵³Ibid. 688-690.

⁵⁴Seven 520.

⁵⁵Seven 822-824.

⁵⁶Ag. 531-582.

⁵⁷Ibid. 1014-1016.

CHAPTER IV

THE ZEUS OF THE PROMETHEUS BOUND

The person who, reading the plays of Aeschylus for the first time, saves the Prometheus Bound till last of all as being the supreme example of what Aristotle called "simple tragedy," experiences, when he finally does come to that play, no little surprise and, if he has given himself to the Aeschylean Weitanschauung, something of a shock. For the poet seems to reverse himself, seems, in a single short play, to seek to deny, or at least in effect does deny, the concept of Zeus which he had through almost half a century of writing for the Athenian stage so laboriously built up. Zeus is so obviously, throughout all the other plays, the idealized favorite of Aeschylus that the spectacle in the Prometheus Bound of that same Zeus presented in something remarkably akin to an unfavorable light is, at best, disconcerting. Zeus in the other six plays is unquestionably the supreme deity, unchallenged and unchallengeable on his throne. The whole dramatic conflict of the Prometheus Bound is based on just the opposite assumption, that is, that there is question and very real question as to the supremacy of Zeus, so that in this play he is not only challengeable but challenged. The Zeus of the other extant plays is, clearly, a just deity, one whose very daughter is Justice herself, one whose will, if not identical

with Fate, is at least in perfect harmony with it. The Pro-metheus presents a somewhat different picture. It is at least questionable--and most critics would describe this statement as excessively cautious--that the Zeus of the Prometheus is just. Again, the noble, benevolent Zeus of all the rest of Aeschylus's work seems to be metamorphosed into a misanthrope, harsh and ungrateful, in the short compass of the thousand-odd lines of a single play. Such would be the general impression gained by a single, not too careful perusal of the play. It is the business of the present chapter to examine into some, at least, of the texts upon which that impression is based.

First of all, then, the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound, as opposed to that god in the other plays, is not a supreme deity secure upon his throne but one engaged in a life and death struggle to maintain his precarious position at the head of the universe. Prometheus sounds early this note of the insecurity of Zeus when in speaking to the Chorus of Oceanids he says:

Yea, verily, the day shall yet come
when the lord of the Blessed shall
have need of me, for all that I am
tortured by these harsh fetters, to
lay bare to him the new device where-
by he shall be despoiled of his sceptre
and his honors. Nor shall he soften
me with the honey-tongued blandish-
ments of persuasion, and never shall
I, trembling before his threats, re-
veal this secret, before he shall loose
me from these cruel bonds and wish to
make amends for this shameful treat-
ment.¹

¹Pr.B. 168-179. Every citation given in this chapter is from this play; therefore the line numbers only will be given.

The reader cannot but be struck by the complete reversal in tone between this defiance of an insecure Zeus and the orthodox submission to his supreme will. A few lines later we find Prometheus making another veiled allusion to the secret hinted at in the preceding passage: "But none the less a day will come when he shall be softened of mood," when in such wise he has been broken. Then abating his stubborn wrath he shall at length come into league and friendship with me."²

We next find the Chorus, instrument of Aeschylean thought, seeking to encourage Prometheus to bear up under his suffering: " . . . for as much as I am of good hope that you shall yet be loosed from these fetters and be in strength no way inferior to Zeus."³ Such a sentiment in any of the other plays would be so completely out of place as to give rise to conjectures of spuriousness, but by this stage of the Prometheus Bound it is so much of a piece with the general tone that we notice it only to pass on. A conversation between Io, another sufferer at the hands of Zeus, and Prometheus points still more the lesson of Zeus's insecurity:

- Prometheus: . . . but now there is no
end of my pangs appointed
until Zeus be cast down from
his harsh sway.
- Io: What! Is it possible that
some day Zeus shall be cast
out of his tyranny?
- Prometheus: You would rejoice, methinks,
to see such a fall.
- Io: And why not, since it is from

²190-195.
³508-510.

Zeus that I suffer ill?
 Prometheus: Know, then, that all these things are true.
 Io: At whose hand shall he suffer the spoliation of his tyrannous sceptre?
 Prometheus: At his own hand, and by his empty-headed schemings.⁴

As the play draws to a close Prometheus becomes more bitter against the god who caused him to be chained thus to the pitiless crag in so forsaken a wilderness. On the frenzied departure of Io he breaks forth with:

Yea, verily, yet shall Zeus, for all his stubborn spirit, be humbled in as much as he proposes to make for himself a marriage which shall hurl him from his tyrannous throne into forgetfulness . . . let him not trust to his thunder and lightning for these shall not a whit avail him against dishonorable and unbearable disgrace. Such a wrestler is he now preparing against himself, a portent most powerful in battle, one, I say, who shall hit upon fire more powerful than the bolt and a crash more loud than the thunder. . . Then, blasted by his evil, shall he learn what a gulf there is that lies between sovereign and slave.⁵

The Chorus, disturbed by the violent wrath of the chained Titan, inquires:

Chorus: And must we look for some one to become the master of Zeus?
 Prometheus: Yes, and he shall bear upon his neck miseries more painful than these I bear.⁶

He carries on in that strain, the Chorus all the while seeking to

⁴755-762.

⁵908-910, 918-923, 926-927.

⁶930-931.

calm him, until he works himself up into a veritable passion. Earlier in the play he was in pain, somewhat dismayed, frightened by the strange noise which turned out to be the arriving car of the Chorus of Oceanids. Now, in his righteous indignation, his pain is forgotten, his dismay and fear changed into blazing anger and unqualified defiance, so that when the Chorus advise him to submit to Necessity, his fiery response is: "Reverence, adore, make up to whoever holds the power. As for me, I care for Zeus less than naught. Let him work his will, let him rule what short time he may--since not for long shall he lord it over the gods."⁷

Hardly has he concluded this speech when Hermes, bearing the demand of Zeus for the revelation of the vaunted secret, appears upon the scene. The "lackey"⁸ delivers the message of the Father only to be met by:

Have I not seen two sovereigns hurtling
from these heights? And of a third,
the present master, shall I behold the
fall most shameful and most swift.
Surely you do not think I bow and scrape
before these new-made gods.⁹

Clearly, no acute powers of discernment are required to observe a marked difference between the "King of Kings, most blessed of the Blessed" Zeus whom we studied in the earlier pages of the preceding chapter and the Zeus we find portrayed in the passages cited from the Prometheus Bound. Other citations, shorter, less telling, might have been made; the ones actually given, though few, are vivid and thus calculated to make as strong

⁷936-940.

⁸941.

⁹956-960.

an impression as possible. And, indeed, it would seem that the impression is inescapable. Whatever else may be said for or against the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound--that he is unjust, harsh, impious, ungrateful--this much is certain beyond all possibility of reasonable dispute: Zeus is a new god, uncertain of his throne, uncertain of his very self, faced by many sworn and powerful enemies, who are conquered, it is true, for the nonce, but who are always strongly threatening successful insurrection against their conqueror. That such a concept of Zeus is the antithesis of the carefully elaborated concept of the other plays is evident. Whether Aeschylus intended it to be such or just what he did intend is a question we have yet to face.

If Zeus is not in the Prometheus Bound the supreme deity that he is elsewhere, it is also true that other attributes which in a former chapter we assigned to him are either lacking or in abeyance in this particular dramatic effort. Thus the much-vaunted justice of Zeus is rather conspicuously missing in the present piece. The Chorus of the Daughters of Ocean, immediately after they have allayed the fears of Prometheus, take occasion to pass judgment upon the just and reasoned method of rule adopted by the new dynasty: "For there are new helmsmen of the Olympian ship, and with newly-devised laws Zeus governs arbitrarily; and what things were powerful in olden time he now renders vain."¹⁰ Pressed by the Oceanids to reveal why he was being exposed to such cruel torture, Prometheus relates his many benefits to mankind, benefits which brought the human race from the darkness of

subterranean caves into the white light of day, benefits which found little favor in the eyes of Zeus, determined to make away with the race of men. When they have heard of Prometheus's benefactions to mankind, the Oceanids exclaim:

Chorus: Was it on such a charge
as this that Zeus . . .
Prometheus: Tortures me and in no wise
grants release from pain.
Io: Is there not some foreor-
dained term of your misery?
Prometheus: None at all, save when it
seems good to Zeus.¹¹

Somewhat later in the play, after the departure of their father Oceanus, the maidens of the Chorus sing an ode of commiseration with Prometheus, telling how they mourn by reason of his hapless lot: "For Zeus, ruling thus harshly by laws of his own construction, displays to the ancient gods an arrogant spirit."¹²

To the charge of "unjust" levelled against Zeus may be added that of "ingrate." Prometheus, in accounting to the Chorus for his outrageous treatment substantiates that charge:

. . . joining my mother with me took
my stand willingly beside a right
willing Zeus; and by reason of my
counsel the black depths of Tartarus
hide the ancient race of Cronus and
all his allies. Thus did the tyrant
of the gods profit at my hands and with
these cruel pangs he has requited me.
For there is somehow this disease in
tyranny, that it does not trust its
friends.¹³

Such conduct ill accords with the notion of an all-just and grateful Zeus garnered from previous plays. Nor does Prometheus forget

¹¹257-260.

¹²403-406.

¹³219-227.

that his torture is the result of more than injustice; the ingratitude rankles, as is evidenced by his return to that theme again and again in the course of the play. "Behold a sight--me the friend of Zeus, who gave him all aid in setting up his tyranny, with what tortures I am bent even by him."¹⁴ "In a word I detest all the gods who, receiving good at my hands, now return me evil."¹⁵ "Yea, verily, I am Zeus's debtor that I should render a favor unto him."¹⁶ Finally the Oceanids themselves take up the strain and cast it in the teeth of Hermes; they are the last words the maidens utter before they are hurled into the depths by the Zeus-sent earthquake. They account wholly justified the anger of Prometheus and, although they cannot entirely approve of his proud speech, they must remain loyal whatever the cost: "With him I wish to suffer whatever needs must be; for I have learned to hate traitors, nor is there plague I spurn more than this."¹⁷

In sharp contrast to the benevolent Zeus on whom we touched briefly at the conclusion of our preceding chapter we have in the Prometheus Bound a Zeus harsh and cruel. The very ministers he chooses to execute his commands in the opening lines of the play give away something of his changed character. Power and Force are simply unthinkable as agents of Zeus in the Suppliants, yet both, one by his ominous silence, the other by his harsh words and brutal attitude, reflect perfectly the temper

¹⁴306-308.

¹⁵975-977.

¹⁶985.

¹⁷1067-1070.

of the master who has sent them down to rivet the unhappy Titan to the rock. Power rails at the unwilling Hephaestus: "You must fulfill the commands laid upon you by the Father--to rivet this rogue to the high-towering crags with fetters of unbreakable adamant."¹⁸ Or again: ". . . for the heart of Zeus is hard; every one whose power is new is harsh."¹⁹ They act in fear of Zeus: "Haste thee then to shackle him about, lest the Father see thee loitering."²⁰ "What, do you draw back again and groan over the enemies of Zeus? Have a care lest some day you be an object of pity."²¹ ". . . for he who weighs our work is severe."²²

Prometheus complains to the Chorus of the refinement of cruelty by which Zeus, instead of putting him in Tartarus for his punishment, has placed him where he may be exposed to the jeers and gloatings of his enemies. To all of which the maidens reply:

Who of the gods is so hard of heart
as to rejoice at your misery? Who
does not compassionate your pains
--except for Zeus. But he rancor-
ously hath fixed his unbending mind
and lords it over the race of Uranus;
nor will he call a halt before his
heart is surfeited or someone by wiles
seize upon his unassailable rule.²³

A few lines further on the Chorus, after urging Prometheus to abate somewhat his speech, concludes: "For unyielding is the character of Cronus's son and his heart is shut to every plea."²⁴ To

¹⁸ 3-6.

¹⁹ 34-35.

²⁰ 52-53.

²¹ 67-68.

²² 77

²³ 160-166. ²⁴ 186-187.

which Prometheus replies: "I know that Zeus is harsh and keeps to himself the administration of justice."²⁵ The daughters of Oceanus press Prometheus to relate to them the cause of his punishment: ". . . and declare to us upon what charge Zeus has taken you that he thus shamefully and terribly tortures you."²⁶ The Titan complies with the request and, after the tale of his benefits to mankind, concludes: "Therefore am I bent by such terrible tortures, painful to endure, piteous to witness. I who gave to mortals first place in my pity am not deemed worthy of it myself, but am thus mercilessly chastised, a sight to shame the glory of Zeus."²⁷

Oceanus the appeaser favors Prometheus with his counsel. His words are the more noteworthy for that he is a friend of Zeus and may be thought to have a sympathetic understanding of his policies: ". . . for there is a new ruler among the gods. But if you hurl forth words so harsh and sharp, it might happen that he hear you, though his throne be high above, so that your present weight of sorrows seem but child's play."²⁸ Clearly, even in the estimation of his friends, Zeus was not to be trifled with. That such was the opinion, too, of Prometheus himself we gather from a query he makes after relating the past and future wanderings of Io, another victim of Zeus's passion, this time of his love: "Does it not seem to you that the tyrant of the gods is violent in all his ways alike?"²⁹

²⁵189-190.

²⁶196-198.

²⁷238-243.

²⁸312-316.

²⁹735-737.

What reply can we give to such a question? Aeschylus himself, we think, would be hard put to it to find a respectable answer in the data we have remaining--seven plays out of ninety-odd.

CHAPTER V

SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM: I. THE COMMENTATORS

The temptation to make the opening sentence of a chapter purporting to present the views of the commentators on a controverted subject read "quot capita, tot sententiae" is one which in the present instance must be resisted. While it is true that practically every critic of Aeschylean drama has his or her variation on one of the four main lines of attacking the problem of the contradictory of Aeschylus as found in the Prometheus Bound and in the other remaining plays, these are merely variations on so many themes. No matter how much writers may differ on this or that detail of interpretation, it seems fairly clear that opinion generally has crystalized into four molds or slots, into one of which we may, without too much stretching or lopping, drop any given theory. Three of these types it is the business of the present chapter to consider and, with what degree of success remains to be seen, reject. The fourth, with which, as a matter of fact, the first can be connected, and insofar as it can be, that first then becomes acceptable--we shall consider and approve in the next chapter.

The first type of solution of the contradictory Zeus problem is one which despairs of a solution, the easiest and, perhaps after all, the wisest way out. We may take Haigh's Tragic Drama of the Greeks as a sample of this type:

The critics generally agree in supposing that the mystery was solved in the later plays of the trilogy. But they differ in their views as to the nature of the solution . . . Perhaps the truth may be that even in the concluding plays there was no satisfactory solution of the difficulty. Aeschylus may have fallen into one of those inconsistencies to which he was often exposed, in his attempt to ennoble the ancient mythology. The story of Prometheus, resolute in self-devotion and unshaken by threats of vengeance, afforded a splendid subject for tragedy. It is possible, therefore, that Aeschylus, attracted by this idea, threw his whole soul into the delineation of the heroic Titan, and, for the purpose of effective contrast, left Zeus as he found him in the legend, regardless of the inconsistency with his usual utterance about the supreme being.¹

The author thereupon cites other writers, Virgil, specifically, and Milton, who, swept away by their genius, departed somewhat from their normal attitude; thus Aeneas is made to look rather despicable in the course of his relations with Dido, and Satan is drawn with so much force and enthusiasm as to disturb the ethical balance of Paradise Lost.

Such a solution of the difficulty, then, comes down to this: Aeschylus, in writing the play, did not intend to give any special significance to Zeus; he had a conflict, a good one, to dramatize, and dramatize it he did, regardless of the consequences. "Hew to the line, let the chips fall where they may," might well have been his motto in this particular case. Since he disregarded, according to this opinion, so completely and effectively the whereabouts of the chips resultant from his hewing, we can hardly be expected to be able to gather them together again into the

¹Haigh, 111-112.

systematic and sustained whole which would constitute the much-desired solution.

Such a resolution of the difficulty is very plausible and, it is hardly necessary to add, for various reasons quite attractive. That it is the most simple and most obvious way of interpreting the play taken by itself is not a reason, in spite of all that Dr. Verrall might have to say on the subject, for rejecting it out of hand. Rather it is a reason for accepting it, a reason that would, no doubt, prevail, were we, as was said, to consider the play by itself, irrespective of all the other Aeschylean work. But unfortunately we are unable to consider the work by itself, for we have six other plays in which Zeus appears and appears in direct contradiction, as we have seen, to the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound. Either Aeschylus intended to present a Zeus consistent in the main or he did not. If he did not intend to present a consistent Zeus, then our problem disappears and we may acquiesce not only whole-heartedly but also with no small degree of relieved satisfaction in the solution now under consideration, that is, that he was portraying the Zeus that was required by mythology for his story. If, on the other hand, Aeschylus did intend to present a consistent Zeus, then such a solution is unacceptable and another, if possible, must be found. That consistency was his intention is the present contention.

Aeschylus, we say, intended to portray a consistent Zeus. Any interpretation of his plays, therefore, based on the opposite assumption must be incorrect. The point, of course, to be proved is that the poet did intend a consistent Zeus. Such an

intention embodied in his plays can have but one purpose--to teach the people, as far as possible, the idea of a supreme Zeus above the ordinary mythological conception. The idea of a consistent Zeus, then, is based logically on the idea of Aeschylus as a teacher, for one who would sincerely desire to teach something successfully, must, as an absolutely fundamental step, keep his teaching consistent.² And Aeschylus as a tragedian was a teacher, a fact that the whole of Greece recognized:

On ne saurait douter que la tragédie n'ait été en ce temps pour le spectateur grec une admirable école . . . De même d'ailleurs que la fréquentation d'une bonne société affine l'esprit, donne aux sentiments plus de délicatesse et au jugement plus d'acuité, familiarisait le public athénien avec tout un ordre de pensées élevées, de disposition généreuse, d'émotions nobles et rares, que la vie de tous les jours ne lui aurait pas fait connaître. Par là, elle rendait à la culture intellectuelle et morale un service dont la valeur ne peut être exagérée. Les grands esprits eux-mêmes étaient frappés de cette sagesse de la tragédie, qui produisait de si ingénieuses combinaisons, qui révélait si bien la nature humaine, qui exprimait en si belles sentences tant de pensées utiles et instructives.³

Or again:

Through that destiny a great poet arose, deeply conscious that he was part of the Athenian nation, to implant in his fellow citizens the eager and devout sense of victory, and to unite classes . . . in a common gratitude and aspiration . . . The men of that age never felt that the

²It might be objected here that Aeschylus is merely adhering to the data given him by his fontes. The tragedians are not famous for adhering strictly to their mythological fontes. E contra.
³Croiset. III. 169-170.

nature and influence of tragedy were purely and simply aesthetic. Its power over them was so vast that they held it responsible for the spirit of the whole state . . . Our belief cannot alter the fact that the Athenians held them the tragedians to be their spiritual leaders, with a responsibility far greater and graver than the constitutional authority of successive political leaders . . . Yet the idea that the tragic poet was responsible for the spirit of the state cannot have been the original conception of his function: for the age of Pisistratus thought of poetry purely as a thing to be enjoyed. It was created by the tragedies of Aeschylus: it was Aeschylus whom Aristophanes conjured up from the lower world as the only man who could recall poetry to its true function.⁴

Let us for a moment consider a passage from Aristophanes, the opinion of a man who, whatever else may be said for or against him, was far from a fool and who knew the Athenian people to perfection. In his Frogs the comedian is regaling us with a debate between Aeschylus and Euripides, in the course of which the former, in chiding his rival for presenting sin on the stage, says:

It was true, right enough; but the poet
should hold such a truth enveloped in
mystery,
And not present it or make it a play.
It's his duty to teach, and you know it.
As a child learns from all who may come
in his way, so the grown world learns
from the poet.
Oh, words of good counsel should flow from
his voice.⁵

Here we have an explicit expression of the purpose and even the duty of the tragic poet and that put into the mouth of Aeschylus himself. It is significant that for all his railing at Aeschylus,

⁴Jaeger, 238, 245.

⁵Aristophanes. Frogs 1053-1056. Trans. Murray.

Euripides does not so much as attempt to deny the truth of the former's statement, a thing he surely would have done, did not that statement represent the true opinion of the Athenian people.

At this point it might be objected that although the mind of Aristophanes seems clear enough as to the fact that Aeschylus was a religious teacher, that opinion is not of excessive weight. The fact is that the opinion of Aristophanes is of considerable weight. The Frogs gained the first prize, an outcome hardly conceivable if the author had misrepresented so gigantic a figure in Greek culture as Aeschylus to that dramatist's own audience. Aristophanes was not so short-sighted as to risk his chances of victory by a misrepresentation of the Father of Tragedy, nor were the Athenian people so obtuse as to fail to notice and resent such a misrepresentation.

We can scarcely deny, then, that Aeschylus was a teacher of Greece. Indeed, Haigh himself, by a fine illogicality, proclaims that function of Aeschylus:

The work which Aeschylus set himself to perform, as a moral teacher, was to reconcile the popular religion with the more advanced conceptions of his time, by purifying its grossness and harmonising its various inconsistencies . . . Few will deny that in his hands the religion of the Greeks has been raised to a higher level of moral dignity than it ever attained before of since.

The first point to be noticed in regard to his religious views is the sublime conception of Zeus as the supreme ruler of the universe.⁶

The proponent of the solution we are opposing himself proclaims

⁶Haigh, 87.

that the outstanding point to be noted in the moral and religious teaching of Aeschylus is his sublime conception of Zeus. As a teacher the poet would certainly want to inculcate above all his prime doctrine--the sublimity of Zeus. To portray a Zeus, harsh and unjust, and allow the matter to hang thus in the air because swept off his feet by a story would be "an act of utter self-contradiction by Aeschylus, a contradiction, note, not in mere fact, in which any man may slip, but in principle, in fundamental and most important principle. Such would be the act of a fool. Aeschylus was not a fool. The very laws of reason demand a further solution which will reconcile his certain function as a consistent teacher with the apparent contradiction in a double presentation of his most important tenet.

Again, it might be argued against the "good story" solution that in another play Aeschylus is most careful to gloss over the undesirable picture of Zeus handed down by mythology and to paint instead the glowing picture of a savior. The Io of the Suppliants is the same Io as in the Prometheus Bound, but what a difference in the presentation of her case. In the former she is the thrice-blessed mate of Zeus, in the latter, the hounded heifer-maid, victim of the god's passion. Aeschylus in the Suppliants above all presents his noble conception of Zeus. There he is seeking to purify the ancient myth in accordance with his teaching profession.⁷ In the Prometheus Bound the myth has another function, one opposed to that in the Suppliants but equally in accord with the same teaching profession.

We are told that it is a mistake to look for any solu-

⁷Purify: that is, bring closer to the common concept of morality the concept of Zeus.

tion of the problem because there is none beyond the simple and obvious fact that Aeschylus was telling the story as he received it from myth. Which last statement could bear some substantiating, if we are to accept it. The Prometheus of the legend is, in fact, a wily, tricky fellow, set upon outwitting Zeus. His sole virtue--if indeed we may call a virtue a trait which we observe in but two acts--is his concern for mankind. Zeus, on the other hand, is largely he of Homer and Hesiod, not nearly, it would seem, so tyrannous and arbitrary as our friend of the Prometheus Bound.

All in all, then, we may say that we are justified in rejecting a solution of the contradictory Zeus of Aeschylus which by its own admission is no solution. The principal reason, or ratio probativa, is this: Aeschylus as a religious teacher had to be consistent; but an explanation which holds the "good story" theory of solution cannot protect his consistency; therefore such a theory is to be rejected. The other arguments advanced but not elaborated are merely confirmatory.

The second position commonly resorted to in the search for an explanation of the apparent contradiction in the Aeschylean Zeus is that of the allegorists. Those who resort to this device do so in one of two states of mind. Either they, like the proponents of the preceding solution, believe it perfectly acceptable that the poet should be inconsistent in so important a matter, and thus fall under the refutation of that position already given, or they must hold that the allegory was and is so evident that no one could fail to perceive it at once and thus

not attribute to the real Zeus what was intended merely as a representation of some other person or thing. Either the allegory had to be evident or it failed, that much is clear from the very nature of the case. The audience in the theatre was, after all, a very heterogeneous group; rich and poor were there, brilliant and dull, farmer and artisan. If the purpose of the playwright was not to be frustrated, morally all of those people would have to perceive the allegory, for if they did not perceive it, they would interpret Zeus as just exactly what the poet did not want them to interpret him as, inconsistent with the Zeus they knew from the other Aeschylean dramas. Further, the audience had not only to perceive the allegory, but it had to perceive it immediately as the play progressed, making still further demands on its being evident. That any allegory of the Prometheus Bound, beyond certain basic natural similarities, is as evident as is called for by the exigencies of the times and persons involved is open to very serious question, if not to categorical denial.

The critic of an allegorical interpretation of any piece of literature finds himself in a difficult position. In the absence of any worth-while evidence in our specific case--indeed, if there were any evidence, the matter would hardly be disputed--the play, allegorically, is an open question. Neither the critic nor anyone else in a time as remote as ours from the date of composition of the play can definitely say that the poet did or did not have an allegory in mind, or that, if he did, it was this one rather than that one. It is this circumstance, this utter freedom of enterprise, that makes the field of allegory

such a Garden of Eden to the hard-pressed commentator, for if only he make some effort to keep his imagination within the bounds of probability, there is no one who can categorically rule out any theory, pet or otherwise, he may see fit to present. Critics may frown, shake their heads, write articles, but all that they can say or do comes down ultimately, in, as has been said, the absence of evidence, simply to this: opinion, conjecture, persuasion. It seems fairly common for the greater lights of classical scholarship to reject an allegorical interpretation that is not propped and buttressed by the most weighty arguments. Such a constancy, in the face of the continual urgings of the allegorists, is not only laudable, it is reasonable. The basis of such persevering rejection seems to be the principle that he who first asserts a proposition to be true must, if he would have it accepted, prove it. And just there, in the proof, is where so many allegories, and, specifically, those based on the Prometheus Bound, break down, for no matter how well their authors have fitted and dove-tailed all the loose ends so that the net result is, subjectively, a joy to behold, they cannot fit or dove-tail the one thing essential, the proof. Whereupon the great preponderance of scholars simply refuse to accept the fruit of the allegorist's labors. All of which is neatly summed up in the time-honored Scholastic aureum dictum: quod gratis asséritur, gratis negatur.

By way of illustration we may briefly cite two of the allegories applied to the Prometheus Bound by well meaning writers. E.G. Harman in his The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus⁸
⁸Harman, v-15, passim.

informs us first of all that the play is not part of a trilogy; then, that point settled to his satisfaction, he proceeds to the unveiling of the masterpiece. Zeus, it seems, is the Athenian Demos, foolish, capricious, passionate, and irresistible. Prometheus--and here is a master-stroke of sympathetic interpretation--is Aeschylus himself, with some reference to Aristides. The foolish marriage which is to bring about the ruination of Zeus is, of course, the "marriage" of Athens with the sea, her abandoning the land, that is, for a naval empire. The gods of the play are the Athenians individually, while the Titans can be nothing else than the old Eupatrid party, mightily fallen from the good old days. Needless to say, the elaboration of this allegory was a labor moderately futile, for, contrary to the general practice of all good allegories, it is defective in the very point on which the whole conflict of the drama turns. In the play Prometheus is adamant even to the point of near-destruction in his refusal to reveal that it is Thetis who is to bring forth a son mightier than his sire. The allegory, by a fine sense of the congruous, makes Aeschylus not only willing but eager, eager to the extent of writing a play and presenting it at the Great Dionysia, to reveal to the Demos the "secret" of the marriage with the sea. Thus the situation is exactly reversed as between Zeus and Prometheus in the play and in the allegory: in the one Zeus is striving amain to extort the secret from Prometheus, in the other Prometheus is striving equally amain to force that secret on Zeus. Bad allegorical practice--that much may be said in general.

Louise A. Matthaei furnishes us with another example of

the allegorical art. More, she also furnishes us with a critical estimate of her effort, and thus be a happy economy we may present and reject in the words of the writer herself her theory:

Prometheus and Io are the Activities
and the Endurance of Man, and the
conflict between them and Zeus is,
broadly speaking, the conflict arising
when the mind of a man contemplates
the order he sees around him--Present
Circumstance.⁹

And in her Introduction: "Indeed, in the essay on the Prometheus of Aeschylus, I have possibly gone too far in describing the issue as almost abstract."¹⁰ It was no doubt with just such efforts in mind that the celebrated French scholar M. Patin wrote:

Nous n'en chercherons pas, nous l'avons
déjà dit, l'intérêt, la beauté, dans les
interprétations ou historique ou allé-
goriques qu'on en a données en si grand
nombre. Nous blâmerons même Andrieux . .
. d'avoir appelé allégorie ce qu'il eût
mieux nommé la moralité de l'ouvrage.¹¹

A third and final solution of the problem of the contradictory Zeus of Aeschylus which we shall consider in this chapter is that which would have us believe that, after all, there is no contradiction, because the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound, although, it must be confessed, somewhat severe, is the same just and sublime monarch as we have in the other plays of our dramatist. A series of excerpts from Wecklein will serve, better than any other device, to bring out the salient points of this solution:

⁹Matthaei, 22.

¹⁰Ibid. vi.

¹¹Patin, I, 285.

But the day of license, of independent action, is past; every one has now his allotted and his prescribed function . . . So Prometheus's wilful infringement of the new system, must needs be severely punished . . . [Although Prometheus knows of the benefit that will accrue to him from Zeus's pursuit of Io, i.e., his own deliverance] nevertheless the less passion stifles in him all sober thought; he sees in the act of Zeus nought but a wanton outrage, and his indignation and thirst for vengeance pass all bounds. The measure of his guilt is full; he utters a speech of defiance and abuse, which Zeus can no longer overlook. [Hermes, sent to demand revelation of the vaunted secret] is dismissed with insult and mockery, and his threats are now fulfilled . . . Prometheus is hurled into the abysses of the earth and his insolent speech is stifled . . . So long as the Prometheus Bound was considered by itself, as a single play, and its inner connection with the Prometheus Unbound was disregarded, it was gravely misunderstood. The fact of Zeus's justice and rectitude, placed by the poet in the background, was easily overlooked; Prometheus's specious pleas, readily awakening our sympathy and our interest, obscured the real and fundamental idea. It was meant that Aeschylus intended to depict in Zeus the cruel, passionate, arbitrary tyrant; in Prometheus, the pattern of a true friend of humanity . . . The poet has depicted Prometheus's revolt with admirable skill. His spectators believed as firmly as himself in the wisdom and justice of Zeus; he neither could nor would deceive them by letting these qualities be for the moment obscured . . . The seeming guilt of Zeus is only a device of the poet, and serves in the end to convince Prometheus and the rest of the world that Zeus from the outset has been wise and just, though a severe and high-handed ruler.¹²

Such is the interpretation, largely forced and at times, as has been italicized, contradictory, that those who hold one lord, one Zeus in Aeschylus must needs fall back upon. It is not necessary here to repeat the numerous texts cited in the chapter preceding this which, every one, contradict the theory proposed by Wecklein and others.¹³ While it is perfectly true, and in this we cannot logically dissent from the position of those authors, that "Aeschylus was a deeply religious man, and the belief, which pervades all his poetry, that Zeus is an eternal, righteous, all-powerful ruler of the universe, must surely have been dominant in this trilogy as elsewhere,"¹⁴ none the less we find it necessary to search out another explanation, one which, while not distorting the evident intention of the Prometheus Bound, will at the same time ultimately preserve the author's idea of a supreme, sublime Zeus. What that theory is it shall be the work of the next chapter to expose.

¹³E.g., F. Plaistowe & T. Mills. Aeschylus Prometheus Vincetus. London, University Tutorial Press, Ltd., 1911, 14.

¹⁴Wecklein, 14.

CHAPTER VI

SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM: II. THE PROGRESSIVE ZEUS

We have seen in the preceding chapter three of the four common solutions of the problem of the contradictory Zeus of Aeschylus. We have seen, further, that these solutions are unacceptable. There remains, then, for our consideration another solution, a fourth and final one, that which calls for a progressive Zeus. If we accept that solution--and we do--it is for us to justify our stand in the following pages, to justify it, in the absence of other evidence, by what we can gather from the Prometheus Bound itself and from such fragments of the Prometheus Unbound as remain to us. If we cannot succeed in justifying our position, then our work, whatever else may be said for or against it, has been negative, that is to say, it has advanced us towards the true solution by the indirect method of showing the ineptitude of other solutions, not by the positive method of building up a successful exposition of our own views.

One of the first writers in English to present the idea of a progressive Zeus was J.T. Sheppard. He says in his Greek Tragedy:

. . . he [Aeschylus] conceived, with noble audacity, of a progressive God. Zeus himself illustrates the law "that the path of learning is through suffering." He was once at war with right, at war with fate; he is now identified with righteousness, subject no doubt to fate, yet identified with fate,

since what he wills is now the effortless harmony. The history of religion seems to show that Aeschylus has lighted upon a profound poetical truth. The truth is indeed poetical, and it is idle to attempt to square the Aeschylean Zeus with logic; as in the case of Io, so here, the justification of Zeus is in poetry and emotion, not to be expressed in syllogistic argument.¹

More recently Paul Mazon, the Budé editor of Aeschylus, has written:

La leçon morale qui s'en dégagait leur apparaissait plus tôt et plus nettement. La trilogie des Prométhées enseignait aux hommes que le dieu de justice n'était devenu juste qu'au bout de long siècles; ses premières violence avaient, en provoquant d'autres violence, retardé longtemps la règne de la paix; par la clémence seule il avait obtenu la soumission du dernier révolté. C'était dire: la justice, à laquelle aspirent les hommes, n'est pas une puissance qui existe en dehors d'eux, prête à répondre à leur premier appel; c'est à eux-mêmes qu'il appartient de la faire maître et grandir, en eux comme autour d'eux, par un patient apprentissage de la vertu suprême, la sage modération, la σωφροσύνη, à qui Zeus lui-même doit avoir enfin établi la paix dans l'Olympe et donné aux hommes l'espoir d'un règne d'éternelle équité.²

Such, then, in broad outline, is the theory of the progressive Zeus, a deity harsh at first in harsh times and while insecure upon his throne, but one who, with the passage of time and the gaining of experience, sees the error of his former ways and emerges the supreme being with whom we become acquainted in

¹J.T. Sheppard. Greek Tragedy. Cambridge, At the University Press, 1911, 62.

²Mazon, I, 158-159.

the Suppliants.

That the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound is a tyrant there can be no doubt. "We learn this," says Thomson, "from his own ministers, who are proud of it, from Prometheus, who denounces it, from the Oceanids, who deplore it, and from Oceanus, who is resigned to it."³ In the very opening lines of the play Power bids Hephaestus clamp Prometheus to the high-beetling crags "that so he may be taught to suffer the tyranny of Zeus."⁴ Again somewhat later we find the tyrant idea recurring: "Such was the profit that the tyrant of the gods received at my hands and with these evil pangs does he requite me."⁵ Oceanus counsels adaptability: "Know yourself and adapt yourself to new ways; for new, too, is the tyrant of the gods."⁶ Or again: "Taking me, then, as your teacher, do not kick against the goad, seeing that a harsh monarch now holds sway, responsible to none."⁷ In his reply to the urgings of Oceanus Prometheus refers to the assault of Typho on the tyranny of Zeus: "And from his eyes there shone forth a terrible glare, as though to assail by force the tyranny of Zeus."⁸

In describing his tortures to Io Prometheus declares: "But now no term of my woes is set, till Zeus be cast out from his tyranny."⁹ And Io inquires: "At whose hand shall he be deprived of the sceptre of tyranny?"¹⁰ Later Prometheus announces

³Thomson, 6.

⁴Pr.B. 10. Unless otherwise indicated references are to this play.

⁵223-225.

⁶311-312.

⁷324-326.

⁸358-359.

⁹755-756.

¹⁰761

the entry of Hermes with "But I see the messenger of Zeus, the servant of our new tyrant."¹¹ It will have been observed that in all but one of the eight passages just cited the Greek word is *τύραννος* or some cognate of it. Even authors who do not agree with the present solution are forced to admit, whatever their theories, that it looks, at least, as though Aeschylus wanted to portray Zeus as a tyrant in the Prometheus Bound.

In view of the somewhat extended treatment accorded the Zeus of this play in an earlier chapter we may content ourselves with just a few citations from the play to recall the principal ideas there presented. Zeus is harsh: "Reveal to us on what score Zeus has taken you and outrages you so shamefully and bitterly."¹² Or in the passage quoted above in regard to the tyranny of Zeus: "Taking me, then, as your teacher, do not kick against the goad, seeing that a harsh monarch now holds sway, responsible to none."¹³ Zeus is a law unto himself: "For there are new helmsmen of the Olympian ship, and with newly-devised laws Zeus governs arbitrarily; and what things were powerful in olden time he now renders vain."¹⁴ Or: "I know that Zeus is harsh and keeps justice in his own hands."¹⁵ Again: "For Zeus, ruling thus harshly by laws of his own devising, displays to the ancient gods an arrogant spirit."¹⁶ Zeus is suspicious of his friends: "Thus did the tyrant of the gods profit at my hands and with these

¹1941-942.

²196-198.

³324-326.

⁴148-151.

⁵189-190.

⁶403-406.

cruel pangs he has requited me. For there is somehow this disease in tyranny, that it does not trust its friends."¹⁷ Zeus is implacable: "Many a groan and fruitless wail shall you give forth; for the heart of Zeus is hard."¹⁸ "For unyielding is the character of Cronus's son and his heart is hardened against every plea."¹⁹ Or in this litotes: "You will not persuade Zeus; for he is not easy to persuade."²⁰

The picture, then, of Zeus in the Prometheus Bound is not precisely flattering. But neither does Aeschylus present us with an impeccable Prometheus. The Chorus of the Daughters of Oceanus, for all their friendliness towards the Titan, feel constrained to tell him time and again that he has gone too far in contravening the will of Zeus, that his vaunting speech is much too truculent, that they cannot approve of his attitude, in spite of their friendship towards him. Oceanus, whom Prometheus sees fit to treat with polite disdain, also advises him to abate his fury and offers to take the part of a peace commission from the Titan to Zeus. Hermes, whom Prometheus greets with "lackey of the gods," is at first very full of counsel of reasoned submission, which is, of course, most scornfully rejected. Prometheus himself is constrained to admit, at least on one occasion, that he is not wholly without fault; the Oceanids, in seeking to persuade him to abate his wrath, ask: "Do you not see that you have sinned?" To which the Titan's reply is: "I understood well

¹⁷223-227.

¹⁸33-34.

¹⁹137-138.

²⁰335.

all [the consequences]. Freely, aye, freely, did I sin, there is no denying it."²¹ And in this sin, in his stubborn pride, Prometheus is hurled into the depths of the earth.

Thus the play ends in something of a deadlock, although clearly, the greater wrong is on the side of Zeus. The ruler of the gods is a harsh, implacable tyrant; the champion of mankind is guilty of stubborn pride. Both are diseased. The wrath of Zeus is a disease; the unrestraint of Prometheus is a disease. The metaphor, carrying with it the hope of a cure to come, recurs again and again throughout the play.²² Of the many loci cited by Thomson we give four. As quoted above in reference to the suspicion in which Zeus holds his friends: "For there is somehow this disease in tyranny, that it does not trust its friends."²⁴ Oceanus, striving to persuade Prometheus to accept his good offices as mediator, says: "Do you not know that words are the physicians of a diseased temper?"²⁵ The Chorus half-sympathizes with, half-admonishes the Titan: "Deserted by your wits you have wandered off, and like a poor physician taken by some disease, you are disheartened and cannot find what nostrums to apply."²⁶ As the play draws to its close we find a final reference. Prometheus has just proclaimed to Hermes his hatred of the gods who, having received good at his hands, were requiting him with evil. Hermes breaks in: "I hear you, diseased with no slight madness."

²¹261-262, 267-278.

²²Taken from Thomson, 11.

²³Ibid., 11: Pr.B. 251, 386-387, 597-598, 604-607, 632-633, 685-686, 698-699.

²⁴226-227.

²⁵379-380.

²⁶472-475.

To which Prometheus replies: "Diseased? aye, if disease it be to hate one's foes."²⁷ This figure of disease, so insisted upon in the first play of the trilogy, would have its natural working out in the form of a cure in the subsequent plays. It is true, and to assert the opposite would be futile, that we have no fragments from the Prometheus Unbound to bear out explicitly our contention that this metaphor was carried out and developed in the remainder of the trilogy, but the figure of disease in Greek literature is a common one, one which is resolved in either one of two ways: either the disease proves fatal and he in whom it inheres is destroyed, or it is cured and he upon whom it has preyed comes to the fulness of his perfection, be that perfection human or divine.

Another point in which we may foresee the intention of Aeschylus is given us in the large number of texts which tell us and keep calling to our attention that the power of Zeus is new. It is the opinion of the dramatist--and, indeed, the majority of men would agree, for it has been amply borne out by history--that one who is but recently possessed of power, one who has risen by violence from a subordinate to a supreme position, is only too prone to harsh and arbitrary domination. The result is that anyone who transgresses the will of the master is made to feel the full force of that master's new power. That such is the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound is borne out by an imposing series of texts. "The heart of Zeus is hard, for everyone is harsh whose power is new."²⁸ "Such is the unseemly bond that the new

²⁷977-978.

²⁸34-35.

Marshall of the Blessed has discovered for me."²⁹ "For new lords reign in heaven and Zeus with new-devised laws holds arbitrary sway."³⁰ ". . . adapt yourself to new ways, for new, too, is the tyrant among the gods."³¹ Prometheus warns Oceanus lest the latter's lamenting of his plight gain him enmity "with him new-seated on his all-powerful throne."³² "Young you are, and young your power, and you think to inhabit battlements beyond the reach of grief."³³ "Do you think, forsooth, that I tremble and quail before these new gods?"³⁴ Nor is this conviction of Aeschylus that new power is harsh power one assumed merely for the composition of the Prometheus; rather it is with him a fixed principle. Thus we find in the Agamemnon, for example: ". . . there is much reason for thankfulness in having masters of ancient wealth; for those who, beyond their hope, reap a full harvest, are cruel in all ways to their slaves and beyond all measure."³⁵

This emphasis on the newness of Zeus's power is another means our poet takes to point to a further development in that deity. "He is displaying to us," says Thomson, "the world, not as it is now, but as it was in the beginning. In the course of ages, taught by experience the adversaries will be reconciled."³⁶ This gaining in knowledge through experience Aeschylus clearly states in several places. Thus when the Chorus is seeking to dissuade Prometheus from too reckless an utterance lest the in-

²⁹96-97.

³⁰148-150.

³¹311-312.

³²391.

³³955-956.

³⁴959-960.

³⁵Ag. 1043-1045.

³⁶Thomson, 11.

exorable Zeus, with heart hardened against entreaty, further blast him, the Titan replies that he knows Zeus to be harsh and a dealer in arbitrary justice, "but none the less he shall one day be softened in his judgment . . . and then, cooling his stubborn wrath, he shall at length join eagerly in pact and friendship with me, no less eager."³⁷ Or again, in the exchange between Prometheus and Hermes which concludes the play we have a pointed reference to the future:

Prometheus: Alas!

Hermes: "Alas"? That is a word not known to Zeus.

Prometheus: But aging time teaches all things most effectively.³⁸

That "aging Time" should teach Zeus moderation with and through the meaning of "Alas" was, no doubt, the devout wish of Prometheus. Much in this same strain is the reiteration of this creed of learning by suffering in two of the plays of the Oresteian trilogy--*Πρόκλος μὲν* ³⁹ and *Ερμείας καὶ Πρωτέας*,⁴⁰ which applied to Zeus in the mind of Aeschylus, as well as to man.

That Zeus actually did learn by experience to become less harsh and arbitrary is shown us by the poet in the Prometheus Unbound, as much of it, that is, as we can gather from the rather inadequate fragments. This play opens some 30,000 years later with Prometheus again restored to the light of day after his long imprisonment underground. The Titan now seems to be afflicted with a new torment--an eagle which comes every other day and tears his liver. A Chorus of Titans, freed by Zeus from their bonds, enter to sympathize with him. After some conver-

³⁷190-195.

³⁸979-981.

³⁹Ag. 177. ⁴⁰Lib.-B. 312.

sation between the bound Prometheus and the Titans, Heracles, son of Zeus by one of Io's line, comes upon the bound Titan. Heracles is traversing the earth overcoming bitter foes and leaving everywhere monuments of his exploits. To him, as to his ancestress Io, Prometheus reveals the labors he must yet perform and gives him directions for his journey. Even as he is describing the wanderings of his listener a beating of wings is heard and the eagle appears. Heracles bends his famous bow and, invoking the aid of Apollo, speeds the arrow on its way. The eagle falls and the Titan hails his deliverer as "beloved son of a hated father."⁴¹

The secret which menaces Zeus still has to be revealed before Prometheus can be released from his bonds. Somehow--the exact manner in which the reconciliation was effected is beyond our knowledge--but somehow, a treaty is concluded. Certainly, mutual concessions have to be made. The name of Earth, mother of Prometheus and the person who revealed to him the secret of Zeus's marriage, appears in the dramatis personae of the Prometheus Bound together with the name of Heracles. Since she does not have any part in that play, it is entirely reasonable that she did have a part, again along with Heracles, in the second play, the Prometheus Unbound. What that part was we may conjecture with a fair degree of probability. Both Zeus and Prometheus were by now cooled of their wrath. They were, however, both of them, standing on their dignity. Neither would unbend and take the first step, though each would gladly have seized upon any advance by the other as more than sufficient grounds for reconciliation.

⁴¹Frag. 201.

To break the deadlock of formality Earth obtains the permission of her son Prometheus to reveal to Zeus the secret. Thus a doubly happy solution is found: Prometheus is happy because, after all, he does not tell that Zeus, king of the gods that he is, his much desired secret; Zeus is happy because, after all, he does get the secret which that Titan had guarded so jealously and so adamantly all these years, the kept secret that was the reason for the prolonged punishment. The reconciliation, then, is effected. Prometheus is liberated at long last and returns to his place among the gods on Olympus. He continues to wear bonds symbolical of his captivity. Aging Time and *Παλαιός* have taught him, as he prophesied they would teach Zeus, wisdom and moderation.

Zeus, too, has changed. He has struck shackles from the other Titans. The curse of his father Cronus, whom he had imprisoned in Tartarus, is revoked on his release; the conflicts of older days are forgotten. The principles of Zeus's government of the world are no longer the same. Before, he was compelled to hold in check and dominate by force the power he had overthrown. All resistance had to be met and checked. Implacable Power and Force executed the new sovereign's will. Now he can be lenient; the gods of the old regime are pardoned; they in turn, Prometheus prominent among them, forget old differences; an era of peace is ushered in. And Zeus, the progressive Zeus, becomes the good and wise ruler who is "King of Kings and most Blessed of the Blessed"--the Zeus whom Aeschylus worships.

CHAPTER VII
QUIBUS DICTIS . .

Conclusions are hard to write. One has nothing to say, he has said all that he cares to: if there were more to say, he would not be concluding--and yet, they must be written. Long-continued custom, it seems, assumes the force of law.

The problem of the contradictory Zeus of Aeschylus is, it must be clear by now, one of some little difficulty. We have it is religiously believed, established at least that point. We might have adduced more extrinsic evidence of the difficulty of the problem; we might, that is, have quoted Adam, Croiset, Harry, Jaeger, Norwood, Sheppard, Thomson, Wecklein, and a host of others too numerous to mention anywhere but in a bibliography, to the effect that the problem we set ourselves in undertaking the present opusculum is not an easy one. It was decided to throw away this extrinsic crutch and allow the difficulty to stand, if possible, on its own legs. It has done at least that. In fact, reading through these pages again, we become more and more aware of a distinctly trampled-upon feeling. The difficulty does not need a crutch. It needs shackles.

It has been our attempt to reconcile what are, at first blush, irreconcilable--the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound and the Zeus of the remaining six extant plays. With introductory and historical material disposed of, we settled down to the delineation

tion of the orthodox Zeus of the six plays. We found him to be the supreme ruler of the universe, just, noble, benevolent. Our investigation of the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound produced somewhat different results, different to the point of contradiction, for Zeus is engaged in a continuous struggle to maintain his uneasy throne, he is unjust, he is ungrateful, he is harsh. With the contradiction thus clearly established, we undertook to present, discuss, and reject three common solutions of the problem -- the first of which would solve the difficulty by saying that Aeschylus did not solve it, that he was simply taking the story, regardless of its consequences; the second would have us see in the Prometheus Bound any one of numerous allegories, political and moral; and the third, which sees in Zeus of the play exactly the same deity as is seen by all in the other plays, not a different, much less a contradictory, Zeus at all.

All of which brought us to our own solution--"our own" in an adoptive, not in a parental sense. The theory of a progressive Zeus seems to be of all solutions presented, the most acceptable. The solution is not perfect nor have we attempted to portray it as such. But in view of the pitifully meager remains of the other two plays of the trilogy which scholarship has been able to salvage, it is, in our opinion, the best, and that both positively and negatively. That is to say, it answers more questions with every appearance of truth than does any other theory and thus builds up the best explanation based on given facts, and it answers more objections against itself than does any other theory. The one obvious objection which it does not

answer and, indeed, cannot answer in the present state of our knowledge, is this: it is not borne out by the texts of the other two plays of the trilogy. It will be noted that this objection, serious enough, is not really directed against the progressive-Zeus theory; it is directed against the manuscript fact of our lack of the other two plays. For that lack the proposed solution can hardly be held accountable.

The contradiction, then, is resolved thus: the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound is tyrannous because he is a new ruler not sufficiently sure of himself to act in any other way than by force; with the passage of time that ruler learns that force is not the only nor the best means of securing obedience and service. He adapts himself, therefore, adjusts his character and ways to fit the dictates of Justice and Fate and assumes a more benevolent attitude toward men. Thus the transition is complete the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound has become the Zeus of the Suppliants.

Sic semper tyrannis!

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